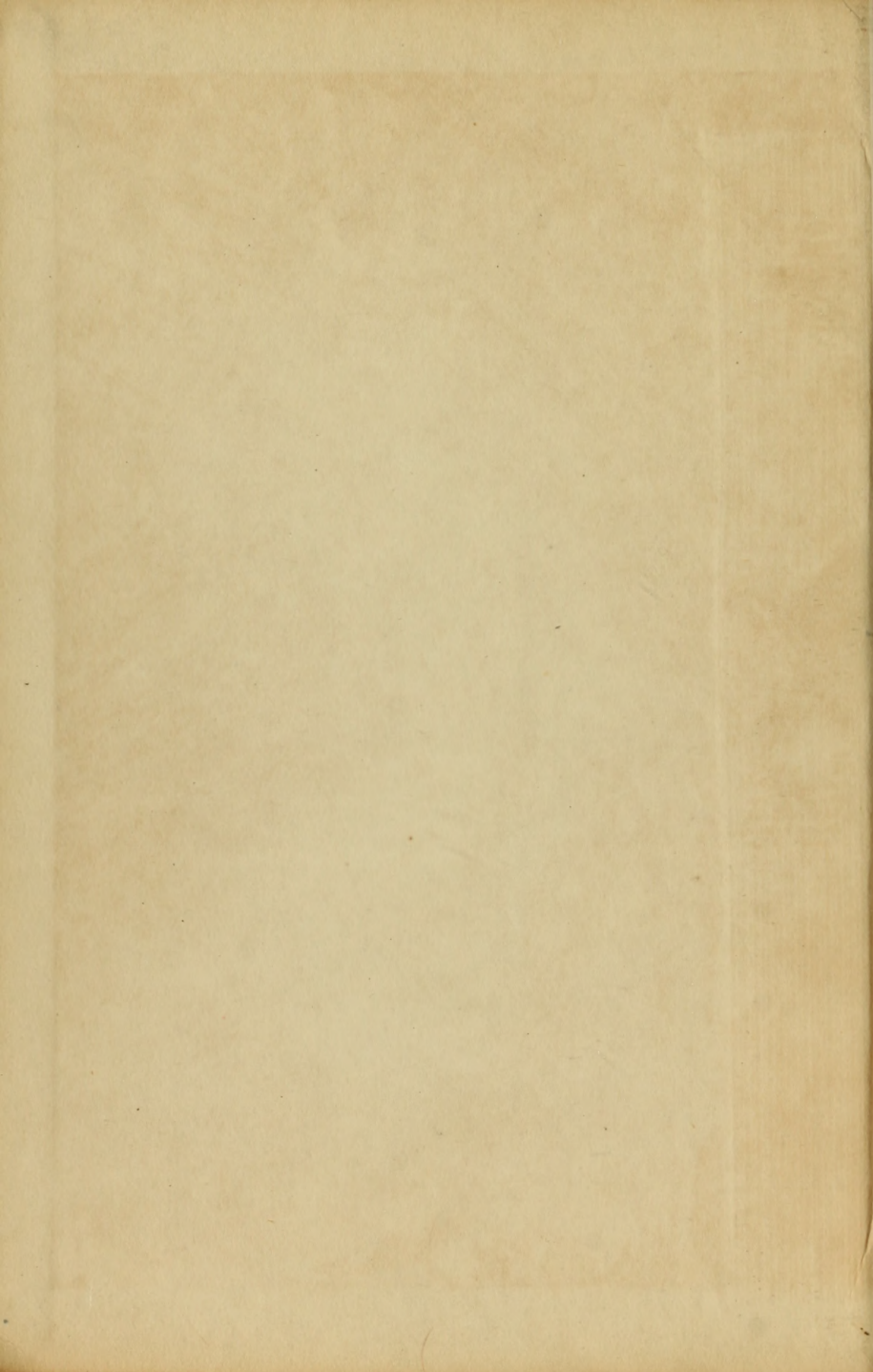


The SNOB



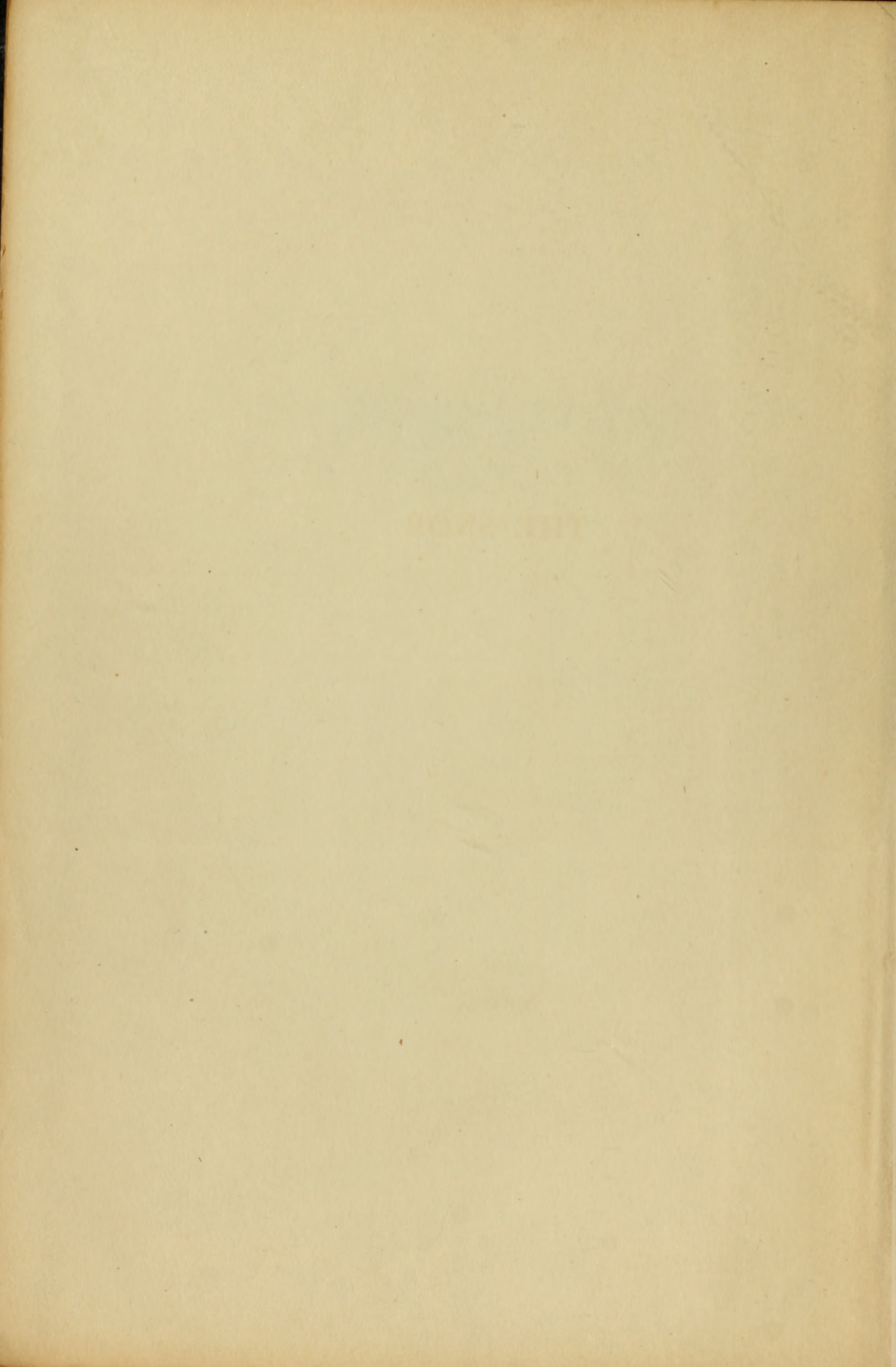
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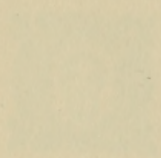


THE SNOB
OR THE ART OF BEING
A SNOB

BY A. J. A. J.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR

THE SNOB



THE SNOB

THE STORY OF A MARRIAGE

BY

HELEN R. MARTIN

Author of "Barnabetta" (Mrs. Fiske's *Erstwhile Susan*), "Tillie,
The Mennonite Maid," "The Church on the Avenue,"
and other stories.



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"Maidens! Why should you worry in choosing whom you
should marry?

Choose whom you may, you will find you have got somebody
else."

John Hay. Pike County Ballads. Distiches.



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THE SNOB

PART I

AS OBSERVED BY HERRICK APPLETON

CHAPTER I

IT appeared that I was the only member of the Faculty who had so much as a subconscious doubt as to the entire genuineness of the remarkable man at the head of the English department, Eugene Curry, PH.D. and my isolation in the matter inclined me to question my own doubts; for even though people in general may rarely be intelligently observant of others, deliberate insincerity, as distinguished from the self-deception to which all humanity is prone, is apt to charge the atmosphere and be readily and quite universally sensed; and as most of our Faculty and students admired, esteemed and entirely believed in our brilliant and gifted young teacher and lecturer and accepted him unquestioningly at his own obvious estimate of himself, as a spiritually-minded, Emersonian, Marcus-Aurelian type of man, I felt that my own lurking uncertainty must be due to some apparent indigestion, either physical or mental.

It is true that in common with the rest of our scholastic family I did from the first feel Curry's charm and for a few weeks did find him intellectually and spiritually stimulating; was thrilled with the impression that in him I recognized a kindred soul; especially in some of his public pronouncements:

"Whoever from the depths of his being offers us a truth, even though he be a heathen or a so-called criminal or outlaw, is inspired of God."

"The world-old words, Right and Wrong, are becoming quaint, antiquated. We are beginning to see God in every manifestation of life—in the face of the savage or sinner as in that of the saint; in night as well as day; in darkness as in light."

But although I felt that my own ideas of life were more sympathetic with his than with those of our other teachers, he soon ceased to hold me so infatuated as he did them; for my insatiable curiosity about human beings made me sometimes see things I would have been happier not to see; illusions are so often more comfortable and soothing than the raw truth.

For some time I fought off the faintly disturbing feelings about the man which obtruded themselves upon my unwilling fancy; feelings which, in view of the apparently fine quality of his mind and spirit, seemed simply nasty on my part.

To most people his strikingly distinguished appearance—his compact, graceful slimness, his fine features, the earnestness and almost sweetness of his countenance, which was, nevertheless, strong and intelligent, his old-world air and tone of fastidiousness, his manners so irreproachable as to seem (to me) a bit studied, not quite spontaneous—all tended to confirm his assumption of a high plane of thought and life.

But when I had heard him speak in public a few times—before the Leitersville Chamber of Commerce, the Rotary Club, the Woman's Civic Club—the gliding smoothness of his tone, gliding on and on, so smoothly, gravely, sweetly, with never a ripple over an obstructing pebble in his undeniably noble, thoughtful and often beautiful ut-

terances, I would find my nerves yearning for a touch of roughness, of Carlylian ruggedness, even of uncouthness, to give reality to this perhaps over-fineness.

That he thought he meant all the lovely things he told his enthralled hearers, I did not at first question. But wasn't he perhaps a bit self-deceived when he so serenely affirmed certain axiomatic moralizings as though he had forged out these stern truths by living them?

"The only absolute and final authority for you is your own soul, your own inner life. Trust it to the uttermost. Nothing else is for you trustworthy. Nothing else is really your own." "Dogmas and creeds imposed from without, from the dead and putrid past, are conspirators against the integrity and authority of your soul," he would assert and I could not help wondering whether, in any real test of these great principles, *he* would stand fast against the pressure of society, of institutions, of prejudices, of the sanctities of the past. Was he really heroic?—of the class of Socrates, Savonarola, Luther, Gandhi?

Well, I would have plenty of opportunity to find out; for I was here in the Leitersville Academy, an expensive and so-called "exclusive" preparatory boarding school for boys, as teacher of history, not because pedagogy was my profession, but because I wished to acquire first-hand knowledge of the reasons for the now-recognized failure of education in America; for the universal unconsciousness of the naïve discrepancy existing between our professed national ideals and our actual conduct and institutions; which education should correct, but which our American education seemed to foster.

One reason for this failure of education seemed to be that thinking men were being driven out from schools and colleges in this new era of suppression of ideas which

the Great War had brought in; this era in which legislatures quaintly passed laws against the teaching of authentic science!

That I was here to test for myself in my teaching of history the extent of this new suppression in education was of course unknown to the trustees who had elected me, or to the Head Master, Dr. Lyman, who had recommended me to the favorable consideration of the Board. And as I was in the enviable financial position of not needing to care when I was "fired," I could luxuriate in a boldness and freedom which could not be enjoyed by professional teachers with families to support.

Of course this quest of mine added much to my inevitable interest in a man of such charm and personal distinction as Eugene Curry, whose philosophy of life seemed to be so sympathetic with my own.

The people of Leitersville, especially the women, spoke often of "his beautiful countenance"; they said, "It seems when he stands before an audience, as though he had a halo round his face!"

He had a way, when he was speaking in public, of marking his periods by a slowly expanding beneficent smile like a benediction. The women fell for it; raved about "that lovely smile!" But I soon found that it was not so popular with men; and our Academy boys didn't care for it.

For myself I grew to wince as it came due; to drop my eyes as it began to expand; for the shadow which it cast upon my heart was of something not quite wholesome.

Many months of the term had passed before this subtle skepticism of mine found anything definite to go on; definite, that is, to me; but quite too indefinite and elusive to bear repeating to any other member of the Faculty without incriminating myself as a suspicious mischief-

maker. And this thing that I found, though apparently trivial, unimportant, was the very thing above all others which Curry, I sensed, would hate to have doubted; the last thing any one else in Leitersville society or at the Academy would have dreamed of questioning, for it really seemed to be his most conspicuous and outstanding quality, his greatest charm, the thing which made women "crazy about him," which over-awed the rest of the Faculty (with two exceptions) and which made the adolescent boys of the school copy his manner and dress. It was his good breeding which I found myself doubting; his assumption of being exceptionally well-born; of being (to use an almost obsolete word) an aristocrat.

As our Leitersville Academy Faculty were, with two exceptions, quite obviously from a plain, respectable middle class, they were perhaps the more easily beguiled into accepting, without any uncertainty, Curry's delicately indicated confidence that he belonged to a superior social order; and they seemed to fall in with his own evident esteem for this circumstance as people are apt to value the unfamiliar and unattainable. It was this slightly evident self-consciousness as to his own "class," his air of gently condescending, of being deliberately democratic and gracious; of being so broad-minded as to be able to ignore the natural class-barriers—that first made me doubt his breeding.

Also, from the fact that he undoubtedly valued and fostered his social success with Leitersville's exclusive fashionable set, I could not escape the conclusion that his previous social experiences must have been very limited; for Leitersville was a Pennsylvania manufacturing city of thirty thousand inhabitants, whose "best families" were a new-rich commercial group of a rather strident tone; pretentious in proportion to their spiritual

sterility. That Curry should be (as I saw he was) pleased by their patronage, be secretly a bit proud of the fact that he and I, and of course the Head Master, were the only members of the Faculty ever invited to the Leiters', the Renzheimers', the Bombergers', seemed to me not only unsophisticated, but quite out of character with his professions, his lofty ideals, as expressed in his popular lectures on such themes as, "The Divinity of Man," "The God-Like in Man's Spirit." To be sure, he did not openly flaunt his satisfaction in his social popularity; on the contrary he treated it with what seemed to me a suspiciously elaborate nonchalance.

That the boys, especially the older ones, loved Curry's classes and idealized him, that he governed them without other force than that of his attractive personality, went far towards disarming me of my faint suspicion of his genuineness.

And yet to my uncomfortably critical mind it seemed an indication of a spiritual vulgarity that his favorites (he decidedly had his favorites and even more decidedly his antipathies) should invariably be boys of some social prestige, no matter how stupid or unattractive they might happen to be. A snob is always a toady at heart and whatever else a gentleman may be, he certainly cannot be a toady.

Since I did share the popular opinion that there unquestionably was a fine side to Curry, whatever other side there might be, I found myself sympathetically fascinated by the evident struggle his idealism had constantly to wage against his strong temperamental inclination towards every attractive girl or woman who made advances to him—and they were many. I knew he did not have an easy time resisting them—if indeed he did resist all of them! I was sure that for his own security Curry would better

marry soon, pedagogy being a profession, like the ministry, in which you could not with safety go philandering about.

He was being rather markedly attentive, this term, to Miss Dorothy Renzheimer, a granddaughter of old Jacob Leiter who was the great man of Leitersville; Dorothy was therefore heiress to millions and admittedly the leader of her "set"; a buxom, bouncing, rather coarsely alluring débutante. It was difficult to imagine what this girl and Dr. Curry—as far apart as the poles in every characteristic—could possibly do with each other; she so undisguisedly given over to the more material appetites and pleasures of life and he so finely cultured, so devoutly earnest. Impossible as mates, it seemed to me. And yet I had often noted that far from being repelled by her rather boisterous manner, vacant mind, vulgar tastes, everything that he was not, he appeared to be a bit set up by her acceptance of him, a mere school teacher, into the inner shrine of Leitersville's social life. Evidently it counted much with him that she was the granddaughter of the President of the Board of Trustees of the Leitersville Academy. Jacob Leiter's millions had not only created and endowed the Academy, but the city of Leitersville itself had grown out of and was sustained by the extensive industries controlled by this powerful old financier and politician.

It was the imperviousness of Bradley, the teacher of science, to any impression from Curry's oratorical eloquence or from his presumably aristocratic breeding and fastidiousness that made me recognize in this shy, awkward, almost uncouth teacher, that very aristocracy of the spirit (whatever might be his birth) which for no quite sufficient reason I doubted in Curry; for which sheer contrariness on my part, so diametrically opposite

to the apparent facts and to the opinion of every one else who knew these two men, I would certainly have been considered, if I had disclosed my vague feelings, unreasonable and eccentric.

Bradley was a fellow whom the casual observer would never have noticed except perhaps to have smiled at his gawkiness, or at his confusion in the presence of girls. He was so careless of his appearance as to be an embarrassment to the school. His shoes were never polished, his hands were always stained with chemicals, his trousers needing pressing and his hair a clipping.

Every spare moment of his day was spent in his laboratory. He seemed always to be in a brown study; so engrossed as to be usually almost unconscious of his surroundings.

But while the boys joked about his absent-mindedness, his shyness, awkwardness and untidiness, they did not, for some reason, play tricks on him as upon some others of the Faculty. It may have been the popularity of his classes, his ability as a scholar and teacher, his simple sincerity and freedom from all "side," that won for him, in spite of his serious shortcomings, the respect of the majority of the students.

Curry, however, from the first, had never concealed his shrinking from Bradley's personal carelessness; his rather contemptuous impatience at the young scientist's lack of social ease; his distaste for what he once definitely named to me "Bradley's commonness." This somewhat snobbish attitude had unfortunately been imitated by a few of Curry's abject adorers among both teachers and students; so that if Bradley had not remained amusingly unconscious of their scorn, he might have been made uncomfortable by it.

"That's the trouble about a job in a boarding school

—you can't escape all sorts of vulgar contacts!" Curry one evening quite let himself go in his irritation at a "contact" he had just had with Bradley in my room, in which the scientist had remained seemingly unaware of the English professor's dignified aloofness. Bradley had just left my room for a minute to fetch from his own chamber across the hall a scientific manuscript of his which he was anxious to read to me and which I was equally anxious to hear. "If he's coming back," Curry added, "I shan't stop, though I wanted to speak with you about an important matter—a strictly personal matter— How do you stand that vulgar fellow?"

"Quite as easily as I stand some of the rest of our learned Faculty!"

"Well, they are, of course, a plain, simple group; but not one is so impossibly raw and crude as that fellow!"

Curry's voice was always soft and low, almost hushed, never varying from its gliding smoothness, whether in a public lecture or in the most intimate conversation. Whatever his emotions, whether highly elated or deeply angry, his voice was never raised or uneven.

"I think," he continued, "it's rather an imposition on the rest of us, having a fellow like Bradley among us. Dr. Lyman ought really to consider a *little* at least the breeding of the teachers he engages in a school like this—for the sake of the boys as well as for the feelings of the Faculty!"

"Bradley isn't ill-bred." I had never particularly thought about it and was surprised at my sudden instinctive realization that he absolutely was not.

Curry smiled. "You love to be quixotic, don't you? I find that rooming on the same corridor with all sorts and classes, subjected to close association with them, willy, nilly, gets on my nerves a bit."

"So I observe."

"Well, Appleton, however democratic my theories—and intellectually I'm as democratic as you are—"

"Why the hell shouldn't you be?"

"One's instincts don't always keep pace with one's theories. I, for instance, have never been able to overcome my deeply ingrained and I must admit unreasonable inhibition" (he smiled at himself) "as to the Philadelphians living north of Market street. Isn't it silly?" he laughed at himself with what I suspected was a smug satisfaction in his "inhibition."

"Damned silly!" I agreed, removing my pipe from my lips to speak very distinctly; for it was only a few days ago that I had heard him say in a lecture at the Woman's Club, "To give the hand of fellowship to the poor and lowly and refuse to bend the knee to insolent autocracy, this is the test of a man's spiritual integrity."

"You must have a few such inhibitions yourself, Appleton; you lack either the candor to admit them or the discernment to recognize them."

"I have the discernment to recognize what you fail to—that Bradley is not only not ill-bred, but that he is—"

The return of Bradley, coming in so eagerly with his manuscript that he forgot to knock, interrupted me.

I knew that such a breach as entering another man's room without knocking was in Curry's eyes a matter of great importance, while Bradley, seeing life's values in another proportion, was apt to exclude from his attention everything except what to him were absolute essentials. That was how I explained his breaches of good manners and I surmised that neither precept nor

example, during his boyhood, could have changed this fundamental characteristic.

"Good-night, Appleton," said Curry, moving towards the door, ignoring Bradley's presence as he usually did. "I did want to talk to you just now—rather important personal matter—but—may I come in to-night after I get back from the dance?"

My feet came down with a bump from the chair upon which they were propped. "The dance? Miss Dorothy Renzheimer's?"

"Yes. Are you coming?"

"Forgot all about it! Will you make up some good excuse for me?"

That a mere Academy teacher should forget and treat so casually an invitation to the Renzheimers', so rarely extended to one of our impecunious staff, seemed almost to hurt Curry.

"If you're not going, surely a mere verbal excuse through me—aren't you going to write or telephone?"

"Of course I'll write, but meantime if you will fix it up for me—"

Bradley standing by with his manuscript looked bored but patient, as who should say, "Why all this chatter about dances and excuses and such futilities when I've got here something really important?"

"What excuse do you want me to make?" Curry persisted.

"Oh, any old thing that occurs to you."

"But what really is your excuse? Why aren't you coming?"

"Bradley's going to expound to me some investigations he's making which I'm more interested in than in the dance."

"Shall I tell Miss Dorothy that?"

"If you like."

"If I did I fancy you'd not get another invitation to the Renzheimers' very soon again!"

"Dear me, man, you don't think I'd count that a loss, do you?"

"Very well, then, I'll give her your message," said Curry, opening the door, "but then don't blame me if—"

Bradley who had been examining his manuscript, here raised his hand to stop Curry without lifting his eyes from the paper in his hand. "Make an excuse for me too if an excuse is so necessary. Er—thank you," he added perfunctorily as an after-thought, as a small boy might speak when prompted to mind his manners.

"What do you mean?" asked Curry coldly. "I don't understand."

"It doesn't matter, never mind," returned Bradley absently, coming to sit near me with his paper, evidently on edge to be rid of Curry and begin his exposition.

But my own curiosity was roused. "Were you invited to the dance to-night?" I asked, and Curry involuntarily laughed; for the idea of Bradley at a dance *was* ludicrous; not so ludicrous to Curry, however, as the idea of the almost inaccessible Renzheimers having departed so far from their custom of ignoring most of the Academy Faculty, socially, as to have invited a man like Bradley to one of their exclusive dances, passing over the other perfectly presentable men of the school.

"I think I was," replied Bradley. "I suppose it was the dance you are speaking of. Are you ready, Appleton?"

"It must have been some other dance," Curry smiled.

"I think the name was Renz-something," said Bradley. "What difference does it make?" he asked in a tone of strained patience. "Shall we begin, Appleton?"

"What makes you imagine you have been invited to the home of people whose name you're not even sure of?—whom you don't know and who don't know you?" Curry, amused, inquired.

"Imagine?" Did I just imagine it?" said Bradley vaguely, thrusting his hands into his trousers pockets, then into his coat pockets, and finally producing from his vest a soiled, crumpled note. "Yes," he added, opening it and glancing at the signature, "it's signed 'Dorothy Renzheimer.' So then," he nodded conclusively to Curry, "you can explain to her that I don't go to dances. Now then?" he appealed to me, tossing the note to the floor, though the waste basket was at his feet.

Curry's expression was a mixture of incredulity and uncertainty. If such as Bradley could regard so indifferently what he prized, it naturally seemed to cheapen his own standard of values. It had been hard enough for him, I had often observed, to temper his own interest in Leitersville society to my lack of enthusiasm over it, but when a man like Bradley—

"I'm afraid," he spoke coolly to Bradley, "you'll have to ask some one else to carry your message for you. When a lady like Miss Renzheimer compliments you," he gravely admonished the scientist, "by inviting you to her home, can't you manage to answer her courteously?"

It was not that he was concerned about Bradley's lack of courtesy; it was his puzzled confusion over that invitation on the floor and an evident desire to drive home to Bradley a fact of which he seemed so serenely

unaware—namely, that he had been highly favored by and should be humbly grateful for that contemptuously treated invitation.

“‘A lady?’” repeated Bradley surprisingly. “‘Is she?’” he said doubtfully. “‘I gathered from her notes that she wasn’t.’”

Curry and I both laughed, but for quite different reasons.

“You ‘gathered’ that Miss Renzheimer wasn’t a lady?” Curry inquired in a grave, gentle tone that was the acme of derision. “You? But that’s delicious!”

Apparently he had actually caught Bradley’s wandering attention. “Now I suppose,” answered the young man in a troubled tone, “that for that very reason I ought not to have neglected answering her notes! I hope I haven’t hurt her feelings! I had no intention, of course, of slighting her. Can’t you soothe her, Curry, by explaining to her that it’s just my damned carelessness about such things?”

“Soothe Miss Renzheimer’s feelings because you have slighted her?” asked Curry with raised eyebrows. “You suppose you could slight Miss Renzheimer?”

“She may be sensitive and interpret my mere carelessness as a personal slight, if she’s not a lady—”

“Excuse me,” interrupted Curry, “but I’m afraid, Mr. Bradley, you’re not qualified to judge whether Miss Renzheimer, or any one else, is a lady!”

“Well,” Bradley serenely assented, “my experiences *have* been rather one-sided.”

“Evidently!”

“They’ve not included what are called social climbers.”

“Naturally!” smiled Curry—while I wondered whether Bradley were actually giving him a thrust or merely re-

ferring to the parvenu Renzheimers; also, whether Bradley were as unconscious of being snubbed by Curry as he appeared to be.

"Yes, naturally," Bradley nodded, "so it's difficult for me to understand the point of view of social climbers. I suppose it's only those inside the social precinct who know how little it's worth the struggle of the climbers to attain! Eh, Appleton?"

"I didn't suppose you ever gave a thought to such trivial questions, Bradley," I said.

"I don't except when it's thrust upon me—"

"What," asked Curry, still amused, "makes you fancy, Mr. Bradley, that you know anything about the psychology of 'those inside the social precinct'?"

"Well, you see, Curry, I was a Bishop's valet for a while and learned a bit about the psychology of the privileged classes. If you will be so kind as to make this Miss Renz-something understand it's not snobbishness that keeps me from her parties—"

"Explain to Miss Renzheimer that a Bishop's valet is not a snob? Oh, come, come, Bradley!"

"They usually are, aren't they? Or aren't you familiar enough with the ways of valets to know? 'It takes an aristocrat to be truly democratic.' One of your own epigrams, by the way, Curry, in your lecture on Thackeray."

"But my good fellow, don't you know who Miss Renzheimer *is*?—that she is Mr. Jacob Leiter's granddaughter!"

"Is it as bad as that? Poor girl, that *is* something to have to live down! What a vulgar old rascal he is, isn't he?"

"Isn't it rather bad taste, don't you think, using epithets like that in speaking of the President of the

Board of Trustees of this school where you are employed?"

"Good taste and old Jake Leiter won't mix, Curry. Impossible."

"Shouldn't one have the decency to speak respectfully of one's employer?"

"To respect old Jake would be indecent in the extreme, as well as highly idiotic. Now, if you don't mind, Curry," Bradley added plaintively, "Appleton and I would like to get to work."

"If I may ask, Mr. Bradley, how did Miss Renzheimer happen to invite you to her home anyway?"

"But isn't that just what we've been discussing?—that she's a social climber," said Bradley, looking vague and absent-minded. "That is why, I'm afraid, she'll have to have her feelings soothed. But don't bother about it if you're disinclined. If she gets no message from me maybe she will let me alone!"

He resolutely turned his back upon Curry and spread out his manuscript on the table in front of us, while Curry, darting a look at me that expressed his despair of denting a pachydermatous so tough, turned away and left us.

CHAPTER II

WHEN Curry, upon his return from the dance after midnight, came upon me sitting up in bed reading and smoking, he found me not only willing but eager, in spite of the late hour, to talk to him.

"Well?" I enquired at once as he sat down on the foot of my bed, "who did the Renzheimers tell you Bradley is?"

"Why do you assume that I asked them?"

"Of course you asked them! Well?"

"If you are so interested, why didn't you ask him yourself who he is?"

"He'd be so bored talking about himself when there are such exciting things to discuss as electrons and Helium Atoms; or a short cut around the Basic Acetate Separation; or the production of oxalic acid from sawdust!"

"Look here, Appleton, have you known all along about Bradley? I remember your saying this evening you didn't consider him ill-bred—"

"I don't have to know who a man is to feel *what* he is."

"Aren't the two things—who and what—rather inseparable?"

"Not in your sense. You called me quixotic for insisting he was not ill-bred."

"He must have been a terribly neglected child!" mused Curry. "How, with such an environment as he must always have had, he could have escaped learning at least how to enter a drawing-room—"

"He was always too busy absorbing all that's known of science to bother assimilating drawing-rooms. Who is he?"

"His father is an eminent Bishop and his mother one of the richest women of the country. He's putting in a year of teaching before going to a German University to continue his scientific studies indefinitely." The expression of Curry's face was a study in mingled chagrin, perplexity, embarrassment, which I found diverting. "Why has he concealed from us who he is?" he continued in a tone of bewilderment.

"But he hasn't—any more than you and I have concealed who we are," I said, and noted with surprise the uncomfortable, almost confused, color that mounted to his face.

"But to let himself be slighted and ridiculed by half the Faculty and even some of the boys," protested Curry, "when a word from him might have—"

"Will the fact of the eminent Bishop and the rich mother make him any less ridiculous in the eyes of the Faculty or the boys?"

"You know it will."

"With those who have the souls of lackeys, perhaps," I admitted.

"Do you really claim," said Curry a shade sullenly, "that your regard for a man could be quite unaffected by the fact that he was the son of a Bishop rather than his valet?"

"In so far as I have the soul of a lackey I shall not remain unaffected. Bradley's bad manners never hid from *me* that he was not ill-bred."

Curry looked discouraged. "I admit your intuition was truer than mine."

"I had no intuition whatever that his father was a

Bishop. What makes you think that a Bishop is so much of a muchness? I think they're rather ridiculous myself—Bishops. Maybe Bradley's ashamed of it."

"Ashamed?"

"Of his father's obsolete and parasitical calling and his mother's vulgar millions!"

"Theoretically, perhaps. They're assets all the same, which even so unworldly a fellow as he must value a bit."

"One doesn't value what one has always had—only what one has painfully acquired."

Although Curry slightly winced at this, he took from his vest pocket the tiny note book and pencil which he invariably carried with him, even to a dance, and as he scribbled, I knew I would one day hear that remark of mine reproduced from a public platform, dressed up rhetorically to sound clever and plausible. I had heard so many of my innocent and thoughtless remarks thus reproduced that my conversational style, in Curry's presence, was in danger of becoming self-consciously epigrammatic and superior.

"People who make a fuss about blood and family usually have nothing else to go on.—Take it down—it's yours," I added generously.

"Are you quite serious," he asked when he had replaced his note book, "In crediting our eccentric friend with being ashamed of his wealth and station?"

"He's 'our eccentric friend' now, is he? No longer 'a vulgar contact' or 'that fellow' or 'impossibly crude'?"

"If he were as poor as he appears to be he'd be a Socialist," affirmed Curry confidently, though he had the grace to color at my chaff. "And I'll be bound he isn't, is he?"

"This very evening I heard him admiringly quote

Ruskin:—"Luxury at present can only be enjoyed by the ignorant. The cruelest man living could not sit at his feast unless he sat blindfold." "

Out came the note book. "Repeat that," he said and I obliged him.

"Does Miss Dorothy Renzheimer offer any explanation of her futile bombardment of Bradley with invitations?" I asked when the note book had again been put away.

"She met him once at Haverford where he and her brother were classmates. He seems to have forgotten it."

"What was that important personal matter you wanted to discuss with me?" I reminded him.

"I want to put a poser to you—a moral problem. If a man becomes engaged to a girl and then finds after a time that though she still adores and trusts him, idealizes him, he doesn't love her enough, has made a mistake, is he a brute to hurt her by breaking it off?"

"Of course. But perhaps not quite so brutal as he'd be if he married her."

"That's the way it seems to me."

His fine sensitive face had gone a bit white, but there was a subtly evasive look in his eyes that made me uncomfortable.

"What would you do, Appleton, in such a case? Would you be perfectly frank with the girl, or try to make it easier for her by subterfuge? Or suppose you still cared for her enough to make hurting her intolerable to you?"

"The wrong began, of course, when you became engaged before you knew what you wanted."

"I?"

"Isn't it your own case?"

"I'm of course speaking to you confidentially, Appleton."

"Naturally."

"At the time I became engaged I couldn't have been more sure."

"What has changed you?"

"For one thing I've come to realize how entirely out of my class the girl is."

"You didn't realize that from the beginning?"

"N—no. I was infatuated. Am yet, when I'm with her."

"I'm afraid I can't help you, old man. I don't know anything about a mere physical infatuation without spiritual charm too—"

"But she has spiritual charm!"

"Dorothy Renzheimer has spiritual charm!"

"Heavens, I'm not talking of *her*! Didn't I tell you the girl is entirely out of my class? You'd hardly expect me to be such a conceited ass as to say a thing like that about Dorothy!"

I stared at him in astonishment. In my heart I was shocked to learn that during all this time while he had been notoriously attentive to Miss Renzheimer, he had been engaged to another girl.

"I didn't know you meant your *social* class," I said. "I thought you were referring to Miss Renzheimer's obvious difference from you intellectually, spiritually, every way. Is the other girl so very much worse?"

"Worse than Dorothy? Why, Appleton, Dorothy is a traveled, experienced society girl, and you know it!"

"How, with your ideals, you can find that bouncing buxom girl companionable!"

"But I am convinced that deep down she is genuinely fine and spiritual!"

"And your other girl is even more crude?"

"I would not call either of them crude—"

"Dorothy is."

"Aren't you a bit old-fashioned? Dorothy is only very modern. Nancy's a quaint little country girl; a sweet, innocent, unsophisticated child!"

"Sounds good to me! Is she quite unpresentable?"

"Not in the sense of being vulgar. In her unworldliness, perhaps," he said doubtfully. "No," he changed his mind, "not unpresentable. But she would never cut a figure in society. She's demure, retiring—"

"I believe you're in love with her!"

"She is lovely and appealing! But she's a shrinking, shy, scared child; a little country school teacher; alone in the world and knowing nothing of life. I'm afraid it will go hard with her," he said, looking rather wretched, "if I—"

I thought (while he hesitated,) that "Nancy" must be quite unusually attractive if, with no other asset than her personal charm, she had lured a man with Curry's kind of ambition, to become actually engaged to her.

"Have you only yourself to blame for the entanglement?" I asked. "I've seen of course how irresistible you are to the sex; how relentlessly they pursue you."

He shook his head. "Nancy's not that sort. No, I pursued her—quite assiduously! But you see it was two years ago that I became engaged to her and in that time I've outgrown her."

"You can't help her to your level? I remember asking you once how on earth you managed to talk down to Dorothy Renzheimer's level and you said you didn't, you lifted her to yours."

"I'm ambitious, Appleton; I can't hamper my career by an unsuitable marriage. Would *you*?"

"I'm not the sort to fall in love with a girl that would be an 'unsuitable' mate for me. Two years ago you didn't think this girl unsuitable."

"One's standards constantly change, don't you think, either for better or worse?"

"But your present standard admits Dorothy Renzheimer to intimacy!"

"Exactly. A woman of the world. You see," he said solemnly, "I've a work to do in the world. I must let nothing interfere with that."

"I don't get you. Your destined career seems to be the lecture platform, through which you will disseminate your high ideals. Now I'd think your having a wife like Dorothy Renzheimer would make the preaching of such ideals as yours absurd."

"Did I say anything about marrying Dorothy Renzheimer?"

"Am I wrong, Curry, in thinking that it's the decoy of Dorothy's social power that makes you think you've outgrown Nancy?"

"Leaving Dorothy out of the question altogether, I shouldn't think of marrying Nancy now. I tell you she's quite out of my class."

"Rot! Damn your 'class'!" I laughed impatiently. "It seems to me that Dorothy Renzheimer would be a far worse *mésalliance* for you than the country girl."

He darted a glance of suspicion at me that rather mystified me.

"Even her wealth," I continued, "would be an embarrassment to you, you whom I've heard beautifully pronounce, 'To find gold one must delve far below the sunlight; riches grow in hell!' Also, 'The real treasures that a man leaves at his death are not those he has acquired for himself, but those he has laid up in the hearts

of others.'” I laughed involuntarily, irreverently. “Really, Curry, you know it would be rather raw, going about talking like that with a millionaire wife of the Renzheimer type!”

“I was not guilty of making her millions. Surely, love can rise above wealth as well as above poverty. The material side need not enter in at all.”

I wondered in my heart whether if the wealth could suddenly be transferred to Nancy’s side and the poverty to Dorothy’s, he would not flop with it.

“Even my people,” he added, “are beginning to protest against my engagement.”

“Your only criticism of Nancy seems to be that she wouldn’t cut a dashing figure in society. You surely know that the figure Dorothy Renzheimer cuts would be found a bit too dashing by *some* sorts of society?”

Again, at this remark, a swift, almost startled glance from his keen but usually veiled eyes was darted at me. Inasmuch as he seemed to regard a marriage with old Jacob Leiter’s granddaughter as a dazzling pinnacle, worthy of his own “station” and of the ambitions he talked of, my slighting estimate of her apparently puzzled him. For some reason he always deferred to my opinion on social matters, though I was scarcely more interested in the nice discriminations he liked to draw than Bradley would have been.

In the sympathy I felt for the unknown Nancy, I followed up the advantage I seemed just now to have. “Even if you, too, have a Bishop, or something equally good in the way of an ancestor, up your sleeve, Curry, it’s not worth the wounding of that little girl, is it?”

“Were you ever in love, Appleton?”

“I had the habit—but I broke myself of it; because I want my liberty. Every pleasant vice I have would

be incompatible with married life. My smoking in bed, for instance—I might die for a woman, but I couldn't give up smoking in bed for her. And I don't want to be enslaved to an establishment that has to be kept up. I would like the experience of being a father—but every alluring woman I've ever known (except one) has seemed to be so impossible as a companion and mate—"

"'Except one?' Well, how about that exception?"

"I've lost her—look here! I find myself stirred by the picture of that little teacher in the country. Curry, do you *never* value people for their essential quality apart from their superficial assets? Do you never *mean* the fine things you say in your exquisite lectures?—such as, 'Our social order plots and intrigues against the spiritual health and integrity of every one of us.' You did say that once, you know, in your lecture on *Society and the Soul*. I suspect, Curry, you're not really religious at all! You've only a literary appreciation of the poetry of religion! You're only a fake liberal—like Woodrow Wilson."

Though he looked flattered at the comparison, he answered me gravely; "I think I'm deeply religious, Appleton. The sum and substance of my creed is that at the heart of the universe is Love. It seems to me that one who believes first, last and forever in Love has laid hold on absolute religion; has encompassed all faith!"

"It isn't enough to believe intellectually; you've got to live your belief."

"Of course. Daily to grow richer in love—love of life, of beauty, of harmony, of flowers, of children, of our fellow-men."

"You don't love those of your fellow-men whom you consider 'vulgar'!"

"Do you?"

"Better than I love those who are insincere. And it depends, doesn't it, on whether the vulgarity is inherent and of the spirit or only external. I've no doubt Jesus' carpenter-like table manners would have hindered your accepting His Gospel! You do give people the impression that you're deeply religious, Curry, but I'm damned if I ever knew a religious nature to value, as you seem to, petty, accidental social discrepancies!"

"Is it necessarily irreligious to detest vulgarity? I should say, on the contrary, that it is essentially religious."

"One can be vulgar about vulgarity."

His hand went for his note book, but he thought better of it and desisted.

"You love to deal in paradoxes, don't you?" he said, coloring in some embarrassment.

"A Negro, you know, has a sense of social values of which a Lincoln is terribly devoid."

I saw that he longed to take that down, but it was too absurdly against himself for even his deficient sense of humor.

"I suspect, Curry, that it is you who are unworthy of that dear little innocent who idealizes you and takes you at your own high face value! I'll marry her! Do you think she'll let me smoke in bed? How you can hesitate a moment between those two girls—"

"The question is how can I honorably extricate myself from poor little Nancy?" he said irritably.

"'Honorably'? Can't be done. And much as I'd like to take her off your hands, she's probably too much in love with you to be taken."

"But seriously," he urged gravely, "what would you do under the circumstances?"

"To be frank, it's an unimaginable situation for me. I could never have gotten into such a mess. I'm sorry to be so useless to you in your plight."

That night the haunting picture in my brain of the unfortunate girl, Nancy, kept me long awake. I had witnessed many instances of the fervent and ideal love that Curry's winning personality was capable of arousing in women. He had said of Nancy that she adored, trusted and idealized him and I found myself regretting keenly the doom hanging over the unsuspecting country maiden; unsuspecting of the fact that the god of ivory and gold whom she worshiped and to whom she was betrothed, had feet of clay and could, for very sordid reasons, be unfaithful and cruel. I rather believed, from what he had said, that she really appealed to the finer side of him as Dorothy Renzheimer could not do and that it was his ambition alone and not his heart that would lead him to cast her off.

"But whether he jilts her, or whether he decides to sacrifice his worldly aspirations to his sense of right and marry her, in either case he's bound to hurt her terribly! If he marries her he'll hurt her through his own everlasting regrets over his frustrated ambitions!"

Fortunately girls in these days had many resources and were no longer forced to mere idle brooding over wrongs they could not remedy.

"No wonder women used to be hysterical, unreasonable, morbid, underhanded, enigmatical! The wonder is that the self-repression imposed upon them didn't long ago drive the whole sex stark mad! Perhaps it has!"

CHAPTER III

I WOKE next morning with an amused anticipation of the carefully modulated change I would certainly see in Curry's attitude to Bradley. But that delectable sight was destined to be postponed for a time. Just as I was about to leave my room for breakfast, Curry, carrying a satchel, overcoat and hat, came hurrying in to speak to me, and I was startled by the white, shocked face he presented to me. But although he had evidently had a startling blow of some sort, he was self-controlled; his tones were more hushed and smooth than ever; his face a mask of gravely earnest thoughtfulness. And yet I found myself feeling surprised at seeing anything so genuine in those subtle eyes as the look of distress and alarm I saw there now.

"What has happened?" I quickly asked.

"I've had a special delivery letter—I'm off at once—will you explain to Dr. Lyman? I'll be back as soon as it's over—it's Nancy—an attack of grip turned into double pneumonia and she—she wants me—she wants to be married to me before she—if I can get there in time—it is the doctor that writes—she is very low he says—I hope I can get the eight o'clock express—"

I hastily promised to take care of his classes and other affairs in his absence and he was off before I had quite grasped the significance of his news.

I had time to think it over at breakfast. A death-bed marriage. Was Providence going to be so kind to that poor girl as to take her hence and spare her the sword thrust with which her lover had been about to wound her? Death was not usually so mercifully timed!

It would be much more like the ways of God with man if she recovered to find herself the wife of a man who didn't want her; who resented her as a burden imposed upon him by a tragic trick of fate.

I looked daily for a letter from Curry announcing the death of Nancy and his impending return. But a week passed by during which neither I nor any one else at the Academy received any word.

I found myself, in every free moment of the day and night, thinking about him and wondering how things were going with him; whether the death-bed marriage had taken place; whether the girl had already died and Curry were staying on for the funeral; or whether he had found her chances of recovery too good to risk a marriage and whether, in that case, he would deal her that wound which would probably make her wish she had died.

On the other hand, I conceived it possible that Nancy, like other girls and women whom I had seen ready to sell their souls for this man of great personal charm, was only a bit more clever than her fiancé and was taking this means of binding him fast at the very moment she apprehended he was going to abandon her.

But much more than his external history, Curry's psychology at this time gave me food for speculation. What would be his reaction in the actual presence of his dying bride, the girl who, trusting and adoring him, he had meant to hurt cruelly? Or, what would be his feeling and his attitude towards a living wife who, he felt, was hampering that precious "career" of his which he seemed to consider so important to the world?

Perhaps I should never learn the answers to these interesting speculations; perhaps the strange mix-up in which he was involved would prevent his ever returning to us.

I did not have his address; nor did Dr. Lyman, as I learned by inquiry.

My first news of him I received from Miss Dorothy Renzheimer who, one afternoon about two weeks after Curry had gone away, picked me up in her car when she met me walking on what was known in Leitersville as "The Avenue."

She was a plump, rosy, rather coarse-featured girl, somewhat flashily dressed in that extreme of the fashion always adopted by women to whom style is the most important matter of thought and study in their lives. While her rather loud tone and manner could not fail to be a bit trying to any one of taste, she was not without considerable personal magnetism. It was not at all clear to me, however, how, to a man of Curry's sensitiveness, this mere physical attraction could outweigh her utter lack of fineness.

As I listened to her slangy talk interspersed with Leitersville Pennsylvania German provincialisms, I recalled Curry's shrinking from what he had called Bradley's "commonness."

"You'll leave me talk about Eugene Curry all I want, won't you, and not tell me to dry up and give you a rest, like all my friends and relations do whenever I mention his name?" she gayly demanded as we swept down The Avenue towards the suburban boulevard. As there was a chauffeur at the wheel she was able to bestow such concentrated attention upon me that I instinctively put up barriers against giving Curry away in any least degree, in case I did happen to possess any knowledge of him that he might not wish transferred to Miss Renzheimer.

"It's lucky I met you just now," Miss Renzheimer continued, not waiting for the permission she had re-

quested of me, "for I was going to call you up and leave you know that Eugene's coming back Sunday."

"Where has he been and why?" I asked. "Do you know?"

"Don't *you* know? Why, I thought you and he were so thick that he told you most everything. He's been called home by illness in his family. His mother, I think. But I'm not quite sure. He's been so funny in his letters—awfully upset! Said he's been up nights and awfully worried and couldn't half write— But of course he'll tell both you and I all about it when he gets back. Gee, I've missed him! I'll tell the world! But don't misunderstand me, Mr. Appleton. I'm not so nutty about him and ak-shally tragic, the way half the girls and women of this town are! It seems they've got to only hear one of his lectures—him looking like an Early Apostle!—to fairly go dippy about him! You've seen it, haven't you?"

"I have."

She suddenly began to giggle. "If you'd see the crop of letters he gets from girls and even married women after every one of his lectures!"

"Does he show them to you?"

"Sometimes. And sometimes the girls themselves show me what they've written to him! Why some of the girls are just *sick* over him!—can't sleep or eat or read a magazine or play golf or tennis. Even lose interest in their clothes. Can't even *knit*!" she squealed. "Just sit 'round moping. Losing flesh over it. Getting haggard! Isn't it the limit?"

"It is."

"Well, I really do believe, Mr. Appleton, the reason Eugene fell for *me*, out of all the bunch that were throwing themselves at him, or just dying to leave him use

them for a foot-mat, was because I didn't pester the life out of him with notes and home-made fudge and crocheted slippers and hollow-eyed looks! He saw from the first that I *could* take inturst in other things—in my fancy work and sports and movies and dances. I do leave him be *sometimes*! It just isn't in me to get so gone on a man that I'd forget *everything* else—though our folks and all my girl friends and even the fellows do say I can't talk two minutes without hauling in Eugene Curry! To be sure, he's the most perfect gentleman I ever met, and I guess that's what got me—his refinement, you know, and his elegant manners. Isn't he an aristocrat to his finger tips, Mr. Appleton? Gee!"

"His gentility," I admitted, "could go no higher without tottering."

"You said it!" she laughed, "And intellec-shal! What Eugene Curry don't know isn't worth knowing, *I'll* say! I'm sure I don't know what he finds in me. He isn't the sort, you know, to rush a girl because she's well off; he's too speart-shal and all that ever to think of the practical and material side. You wouldn't think he'd take to a dumb thing like me, now, would you?—as awfully well educated as he is. I know I ought to take up reading—but, you see, I guess I overdid reading when I was along about sixteen and you know how it is when you overdo a thing, you get sick of it and lose your taste for it. And I guess I did used to read too much and that's what's wrong with me *now*—I don't care so much for reading as I ought to. Why, I guess I've read as many as five of Gene Stratton Porter's books and six of Harold Bell Wright's and three of Robert Chambers and then the women's magazines—and you know when you once overdo a thing that way you're apt to drop it and never want to take it up again. But I know I really

ought to read an improving book some times—only I'm so fond of needle work—embroidery and knitting—that when I do have a half hour to sit down I'm more apt to pick up my fancy work than a book. Or I'd sooner sit and play penuchle in the evenings if I'm home."

"But do you know," I comforted her, "I really think Dr. Curry himself would prefer penuchle to Harold Bell Wright or Gene Stratton-Porter or the women's magazines."

"Do you? Oh!" she suddenly smiled, "I see what you mean. You think those authors aren't deep enough for Eugene. Well," she added on a note of defiance, "it isn't as if Eugene hadn't had his choice of high-brow girls if he liked that kind! Why, I heard Josephine Stauffer say (when Mary Lehman said she'd not like to trust herself alone in the dark with a man with such a mouth as Dr. Curry's) Josephine said (and she's a Wellesley graduate, mind you) she said, 'Oh, if you think he's not to be trusted alone in the dark, I'll certainly contrive to have the lights go out next time he calls on *me*.' So, you see, I guess he fell for me because I left *him* do the courting."

"Courting?"

"Sure! Don't give us away though! We're not announcing anything just yet. Eugene says not to till he's made good. Got a bigger job, you understand, more up to my level. Not that I mind his being only an Academy teacher—though before I met *him*, if anybody'd said Academy teacher to me, I'd have hooted at the *i-dea*! Oh, excuse me, Mr. Appleton! What will you *think* of me—"

"Don't mind me. You are engaged to Curry then—if I may ask?"

"Oh, but I promised him not to tell yet. He's got his

pride, you see, and doesn't want our engagement to get out until he's landed something. Which of course he *will*. I know he'll be president of a university some time—or even more'n that. Look at Wilson!"

"Yes, look at him!"

"Well, I guess! And I don't see why Eugene shouldn't go just as high. Don't you love the name Eugene? I think it's swell! I don't care so much for Curry, though it's anyhow better than Renzheimer! Maybe I didn't have a jolt when I found the girls at Stanford Hall (the boarding school I went to on the Hudson) *laughing* at my name, when here in Leitersville—well, *you* know what our name is here! But outside Leitersville—well, I pretty near have to apologize for it! Say, I'm afraid Eugene won't like it that I've left it get out—our engagement. He's awfully funny about it! You won't leave on, will you, Mr. Appleton, that I told you?"

"He will probably tell me himself," I said uneasily, "when he gets back."

"I don't know—he's so afraid the *Leitersville Gazette* will get hold of it and publish it with big headlines, the way they print everything about our bunch and especially about our family."

I wondered whether his fear had been that the *Leitersville Gazette* announcement might come under Nancy's eyes.

"He says," continued Dorothy, "he thinks Granddad would be so opposed to such an unambitious marriage for me that he'd have him fired out of the Academy! He's sure he'll land a better position soon. Maybe get to be headmaster of a big school. But, Mr. Appleton," she added confidentially, "do you know I really think our engagement's the only thing that'll *save* him from getting fired, for Granddad's getting awfully sore at some things

Eugene says in his lectures about what-you-call-'em—'vested interests'—*you* know. Granddad says Dr. Curry was hitting a *di*-rect blow at him when he said in a speech at the Rotary Club luncheon last month, 'Do not dare to offer charity to those to whom you refuse justice.' And then something about you can't expect 'the seeds of injustice and greed' to blossom forth into 'the fruits of charity and philanthropy.' Granddad was furious. He's been repeating those things till I know 'em by heart and so does every one in the family! I told Eugene and he was worried. He said he'd be more careful."

"It's cheering to hear that Curry has outraged some one—universal popularity, you know, being rather a suspicious sign of mediocrity."

"Then leave me be mediocre! What's the good of being smart if it gets you disliked?" asked Miss Renzheimer reasonably.

"You'd rather be President than be right, wouldn't you?"

"I'll tell the world I would!"

"But do you think Dr. Curry would?"

"Well, of course I know he's awfully speart-shal and all that, but he does have some common sense, I hope!"

"I'm sure he has plenty of that—what you call common sense."

"What *I* call common sense! And what do you call it, pray?"

"An over-estimated virtue, my dear, which usually means, 'Keep a safe middle course. Never rise to dangerous heights.'"

"Well, I hope Eugene never will rise to such a height that he can't see what's to his own advantage! Do you know," she went on with naïve candor, "I can't see why a man like Granddad gets so scared of men like you and

Eugene; *why* he thinks you could hurt him any, when he could buy you out sixty times over!"

"The reason the rich are so scared of any interference with the social order is that many of them know that they're incapable of earning a living by working—by genuine service to society."

"But Granddad works harder than any man I know. He's earned all he's got."

"No, my child, he hasn't. He has gotten it through speculation, not through service. As society is constituted great fortunes are not made through service."

"Oh, well," she dismissed this as too deep water for her, "the point is Eugene's too proud to marry such a rich man's heiress till *he's* got something to show. But pride or no pride, he'll have to consent to our announcing our engagement right away if he don't want Granddad to smash him!"

"Would your engagement stop Granddad's smashing him? Won't he, as Dr. Curry fears, oppose the engagement?"

"But I don't have to listen to Granddad. He don't support me. My own parents won't oppose it when they know my heart's set on it."

"You're not afraid your grandfather will disinherit you if your marriage doesn't please him?"

"He'll probably bluster round and threaten to. But once Eugene's in the family, I'm sure Granddad will advance him all he can. Granddad's awfully ambitious for the family. And Eugene's ambitious too, so I don't see why they can't hit it off. Granddad will tell him, of course, that he's got to stop saying those things he gets off about 'Capital' and 'special privileges' and such things, and I'm sure he'll find Eugene reasonable, don't you think so?"

"Eminently reasonable, I fancy!"

"So do I; so just as soon as he gets back," she said as she let me out at the Academy gates, "I'll tell him I am going to announce our engagement."

The situation struck me as possessing lively possibilities.

CHAPTER IV

IT was evident to me from the very hour of Curry's return that he regretted, as much as I wondered at, his injudiciousness in having taken me into his confidence. He so patently avoided me that I knew he shrank from the explanations he must necessarily consider due me after having told me so much. I wondered whether Dorothy Renzheimer had told him of her having let out to me their engagement. I felt so embarrassed for him at that possibility that I kept out of his way as much as he slunk out of mine. To be sure, we met constantly in the presence of others; at Faculty meetings, at chapel, in the dining-room, or in the teacher's "den." I saw what others also noticed, that he was pale and distraught; that he had certainly been through some harrowing experience during his absence.

It became clear to me within a week after his return that I was not the only person he was avoiding. He was dodging Dorothy Renzheimer. Almost daily I answered a voice on the telephone which I recognized to be hers, asking for Dr. Curry; and almost invariably the pupil I dispatched to summon him brought back the answer that Dr. Curry regretted he was too busy to respond. Towards the end of the week Miss Renzheimer's voice on the telephone had become not only insistent but shrill.

Every day when I sorted and distributed the Academy mail, I would find a note addressed to Curry in her handwriting (with which I was familiar from the numerous invitations I had had from her). But in the outgoing mail which I also had to inspect, I never once saw any

letter addressed to her. In fact Curry did not appear to be writing letters to any one since his return.

There were occasional letters in the incoming mail addressed to him, in rather a literary hand, postmarked "Virginsville." I wondered whether they were from Nancy; whether she had fooled him by getting well after he had obligingly married her. Or was he perhaps waiting hourly to hear of her death to relieve an agonizing situation? Or was the girl breaking her heart with suspense as Dorothy was damaging hers with pique and rage? I noticed that every time I handed him a Virginsville letter bearing the literary handwriting, his face became cold and set; almost, I thought, resentful.

One afternoon as I was strolling about the Academy grounds (it was the middle of a mild March) smoking my pipe, I had an encounter with Miss Renzheimer as she came hurrying up the asphalt walk, leaving her car, I observed, outside the Academy gates.

I noticed at once as she drew near that she, like Curry, was looking white and worried. But at sight of me her face lit up with relief.

"Oh! I *am* glad to see you! Can you talk with me for a few minutes before I see Eugene?"

"Certainly. Shall we go to the house or walk about here?"

"Wherever we're least likely to be interrupted."

"We're safe here, I think. Have you an appointment with Curry?"

"Have I an *appointment* with him!" she repeated resentfully, her florid face becoming a deeper red. "No, I have *not*! I'm here to-day to take him unawares! It's the only way I *can* take him, for he refuses to see me!" she exclaimed hysterically. "Can you beat it? Only once since he came back over a week ago, have we met

and then only accidentally for ten minutes! He won't talk to me on the phone, he won't answer my letters, he won't come to see me! And before I leave this Academy to-day, Mr. Appleton, I'm going to know the reason why! See?" she demanded, striking her hands together for emphasis.

"I see."

As during the next half hour we slowly strolled up and down the long asphalt walk in front of the building, I wondered whether Curry, from his bed-room window which overlooked the walk, was watching us.

"He looked so wild that day I did see him!" she said breathlessly. "It must be something awful that's making him act like this!"

"How did he account for himself when he met you?"

"He said he'd had some trouble at home, but he wouldn't say what it was; he only begged me to trust him. And he flatly refused to have our engagement announced. Seemed ak-shally terrified at the idea! Now, Mr. Appleton, there's sure something fishy about all this and I'm here this afternoon to find out what it is!"

"It's certainly your right to know."

"Yes, and I'm not going to fool 'round waiting any longer! Have *you* any idea what's up?"

"I've not seen Curry alone since he came back."

"Oh, he avoids you too, does he?"

"He does."

"What do you suspect?" she demanded.

"I don't suspect my friends," I parried.

"Oh, don't you indeed! How nice and moral of you! Do you mean to tell me you don't know a single thing that could account for this change in Eugene?"

"If you don't know, how should I?"

"You're evading me!"

"My word of honor, Miss Renzheimer, that I know not why Dr. Curry is avoiding us both. I'm as curious as you are."

"Curious! When my heart's breaking!"

"Oh, no, it isn't, my dear girl. It's much too stout, not to say tough. You're not suffering a tenth of what poor Curry is evidently enduring! His worst enemy could pity him!"

"But why can't he *tell* us? Why don't you ask him?"

"Have you asked him?"

"Have I asked him! Have I kept the Academy wires hot the past ten days? Have I bombarded him with notes? Have I threatened to break our engagement? What I want to know is what's come *over* Eugene? Has he gone and committed something—a crime maybe?"

"Probably."

"Oh, do be serious, please, Mr. Appleton! When you see how I'm suffering!"

"When I see how mad you are! My dear child, I repeat, you're not half so pathetic as he is. Take comfort from that."

"Cold comfort! I don't want him to suffer! Look here, Mr. Appleton, do you think there's another girl in this?" she suddenly demanded violently.

"Do you?" I asked to gain time.

"Doesn't it look awfully like it?"

"Not necessarily."

"You know perfectly well that if it were anything else under heaven he could tell us what it was."

"Oh, I'm not so sure of that."

"Yes, you are!" she affirmed dogmatically. "But if he knew what's hanging over him! Granddad's telling the trustees they're not to reëlect him for next year! On account of his lectures. Now if we were married I know

Granddad would take that back. Another thing—promise not to tell!”

I nodded.

“Dr. Lyman is going away in the fall to be Dean of an Indiana college and there’d be Eugene’s chance to get the Head Mastership here. *In case* he was my husband. Not otherwise.”

I knew, even better than she did, how such a turn of affairs would more than fulfill Curry’s present ambitions and I hoped, for Nancy’s sake more than for his, that she was not the impediment to their realization.

“I think you are counting too much on your grandfather’s forbearance towards even a grandson-in-law whom he considered dangerous to his interests,” I suggested.

“But you see when Eugene is in the family Granddad’s interests will be so much Eugene’s interests too that I am sure he won’t want to be dangerous to them.”

“Your deduction is only too sound, I’m afraid!”

“Here he comes!” she suddenly exclaimed, and I looked up to see our subtle friend hurrying towards us, his face pale to the lips.

As he lifted his hat upon reaching us, he did not stop in his quick walk, but slipping his hand under Dorothy’s arm in passing, with an air of proprietorship, he propelled her out towards her car.

So he had apparently recognized at last the necessity of coming to an understanding with her.

If the result should be his expulsion from the Academy, just at the very moment when he might have become its Head Master, I could not help thinking that Nancy, if she were indeed alive and the cause of his disaster, would probably pay a heavy price.

That evening after dinner when the Faculty was

gathered in the library for coffee, I tried to read in his face some signs of his having eased his troubled mind by his talk with Dorothy. But I could detect no change from the pale, sick, anxious aspect he had worn ever since his return. Evidently their meeting had not been for him a reassuring experience.

During all this week I had observed that his distress had not so greatly absorbed him as to hinder his adopting guardedly, very slowly and deliberately, a new attitude towards Bradley, the Bishop's son; never snubbing him now, as he had been wont to do; contriving, whenever the teachers met, to sit near him, to pay him unobtrusive attentions such as rising to close a window when Bradley turned up his coat collar against a slight draught; offering him a pencil when he was vainly fumbling through his pockets for his own; passing him his own cup of coffee and himself waiting to be served later; coming to his defense unobtrusively in an argument among a few of the teachers about the teaching of science versus William Jennings Bryan. He did it all with so much *finesse* that it was not, I am sure, noticed immediately by any one but myself. Certainly not by Bradley, whose serene unconsciousness of Curry's changed tactics amused me not a little.

Just now, as I stood chatting with Mrs. Lyman, the Head Master's wife, directly behind the sofa where Curry sat beside Bradley, I overheard the former suggest to the young scientist that he give him an hour that evening for an exposition of his hobby, the elements in the structure of matter. Bradley eagerly agreed, putting aside his untouched cup of coffee at once and inviting Curry to come immediately to his room. Curry gently and gravely reminded him that they could not be quite so unceremonious as that.

"Just as soon as possible, however, we'll say good-night to Mrs. Lyman—"

Now did Curry really care a damn about the structure of matter, I wondered, or was he only using it as a sure road to a friendship with Bradley, the Bishop's son?

I wondered whether Bradley, like other people, would succumb to Curry's charm and become one of his satellites. Or would he prove too intelligent to be taken in by mere phrases which if actually lived up to would surely bring a man to the glory of Calvary—or of Leavenworth Prison! I found it interesting to look on at this little drama.

"What is it *now*?" Mrs. Lyman suddenly recalled my wandering attention to herself. "You know you always seem to be looking on at us all as though we were characters in a play! I believe that's the way you actually do see us! What *are* you seeing through those opera glass eyes of yours just now?"

"I'm seeing Dr. Curry struggling mightily, amidst the mad disorder of Bradley's room, to follow the intricacies of an exposition of the 'structure of matter in which all the elements are supposed to be built up of electrons'—the while his very soul is shuddering at his environment!"

"Do you know the maids simply refuse to try to do anything with Mr. Bradley's room? His mother wants him to have a valet, but he refuses and of course it wouldn't do here."

I recalled that I had heard Curry say some weeks ago that no gentleman could live in "such a pig-sty" as Bradley's bed-chamber looked. I could in fancy hear how gravely he would now rebuke any one he heard making a remark like that of the Bishop's son.

That night I could not sleep for the fantastic picture that danced in my brain. I saw Curry's disconcerted

face when I would suddenly inform him that he had misunderstood about Bradley—his father not being a Bishop at all, but a Butcher—

“The words being so much alike, you know, Curry, though one mightn’t think they would be—both beginning with a B and having the sound of sh in the middle—Bish, Butch—see? Awkward, isn’t it, now that you and he have become so friendly; of course *he* hasn’t changed any, being just the same raw, crude fellow he always was.”

Then when Curry had tactfully withdrawn his friendliness to the butcher’s son and had reestablished his first chill relation with him, I would break it to him that what Bradley was, for a fact, was an English nobleman. I could so clearly see Curry advancing, retreating, advancing again; see-sawing in dizzy bewilderment from high to low to high once more, that finally in sheer weariness of the silly spectacle, I fell asleep.

As this is not the story of my own life, but that of Curry’s marriage, I shall not digress to record here any of my own experiences at the Leitersville Academy except such as bear upon Curry’s career; among which I must include the result of my putting to the test the question as to whether such a thing existed as academic freedom of speech.

I had been aware for some time before the storm broke over my head, of rumblings and flashes of lightning. I had even received a warning letter from old Jacob Leiter; and Dr. Lyman had very gravely expressed his dislike of some of the “unsettling ideas” which I was giving the boys in my history classes.

I had not answered Jacob Leiter’s letter, which I considered ignorant, impertinent meddling with my business of which he knew absolutely nothing; nor had I promised

the Head Master that I "wouldn't do it any more." Neither had I argued with him in favor of a teacher's freedom as over against a text-book automaton. I simply heard him in silence and continued to teach what I was presumably paid to teach—the truth of history, instead of a veiled and distorted version to camouflage modern diplomacy.

Even when Dr. Lyman refused my request that he order, for students' use in my classes, H. G. Wells' *Outlines of History*, reproving me for wanting to put into the hands of boys such "radical propaganda," I held my peace.

The climax approached when I was reported to have told my classes that in the place of weak nations submitting to strong ones through fear; in place of pride and selfishness flaunted through force of arms; of a relentless Imperialism that seeks only its own security at the expense of mercy and justice (explaining here that I referred not only to German and British Imperialism, but our own Imperialism in Haiti, Mexico and the Philippines)—in place of this cut-throat, criminal relation among nations, I hoped the new generation, of which the boys of the Leitersville Academy were a part, would have another ideal—an ideal of nations helping and serving each other; of universal freedom; of the death of all coercion, aggression and revenge; of an Empire founded on Love and Service instead of Might.

I succeeded in firing the enthusiasm of those among the boys whom Dr. Lyman considered "hot headed," "erratic," "unreliable," "unbalanced." The "solid" boys remained either unaffected or inimical to my suggestions.

The enthusiasm of the "unstable" boys mounted so high as to reach the ears not only of Dr. Lyman, but of their parents, of Jacob Leiter, of other trustees. Small

quarter would I have received had I not been, for reasons quite irrelevant to education, an asset to the school. But even the prestige of my father's name was not sufficient to protect me from the tide of protest which set in on the day when I was reported to have taught innocent, unprotected Youth that the time would surely come when public opinion would repudiate war just as it had repudiated dueling; when the soldier, like the duelist, would be regarded as a law-breaker, the nations which declared war as criminals against humanity.

I was given twenty-four hours to pack my trunk and get out—"for the best good of the school."

Of the sixteen boys who bolted and left at the same time, as a protest in favor of free speech, ten were forced or persuaded by their parents (I learned later) to return.

Of the Faculty, Bradley and Carpenter, the teacher of French and of German, were the only ones who supported, to the extent of resigning at once, the principle for which I stood.

Now Curry had constantly, during my months of association with him, expressed himself as being entirely in accord with my "liberal" ideas, though he had been wont to warn me now and then that he thought I was becoming a bit "injudicious."

"You deliberately invite disaster!" he would complain.

That was precisely what I was doing, but the disaster I was inviting was for an academic system that would suppress truth and defeat the very ends of education. For myself personally the loss of my position would be no disaster, since of course I knew my position in the Academy to be untenable and did not wish to retain it one hour after my freedom was curtailed.

Through all the high excitement of that sensational day

on which I was notified to pack and leave, I looked hourly for some word or sign from Curry. Surely he would come and reaffirm to me his sympathy with my convictions which he had so often expressed. Now that I was, as he thought, "down on my luck," being martyred for those convictions, I felt it was surely due to the friendship he had always openly professed for me, due to his own self-respect, that he should at least come and speak to me, if nothing more; if only to save his face. Of course if he would live up to his own fine phrases he would do much more; do as Bradley and Carpenter had done within an hour of my sentence—refuse to teach in a school where subservience to special interests, bigotry, intolerance, made genuine education impossible; a school which rather undisguisedly checked any least tendency of a boy to think for himself, and eliminated every influence which might stimulate him so to do. No teacher worthy of his high calling would consent to work under such conditions. The men who did submit ceased to be teachers and became puppets obeying the pull of a string; which directed them not to walk, but creep.

It was hard for me to believe that Curry would stand aloof from me in this hour which he must consider my Calvary.

But long before the day was over, I recognized from his almost frightened avoidance of me that he believed a sympathetic attitude towards me at this time would bring him into disfavor with the trustees; that he considered my proximity as dangerous as smallpox; and I realized fully that, for him, loyalty not only to friendship, but to love and to ideals, was secondary to loyalty to his own ambitions.

Yet how well I remember the earnest, illumined countenance with which he had proclaimed one evening, in a

lecture before the Civic Club, "Though we know that Liberty is the mother of all progress, yet we seem afraid to trust her! In our age, as in every age, there are martyrs for Liberty. Will men never learn to trust her?"

Knowing the ways of Jacob Leiter, the autocrat of Leitersville, I had taken the precaution long ago, in anticipation of my expulsion from the Academy, to buy a house centrally located, which I could use in case the only good hotel in the town, owned by the Leiter Company, found a pretext for refusing to take me in and every public hall for lectures were denied me.

I at once summoned from New York by telegram my Chinese houseman and opened up my furnished house; and to Jacob Leiter's chagrin, I turned the parlor into a lecture and open forum hall and advertised by circulars (the two newspapers controlled by Leiter refusing advertising space) a course of lectures on historical themes, free to the public; working my sensational expulsion from the Academy for all there was in it for publicity purposes, to draw a crowd whom I hoped to enlighten a bit as to the czarism that was creeping upon American life, education, politics, labor.

This course of lectures proved to be a big success with the proletariat and the wage-earners of the town, including clerks and school teachers, but it did not attract the leisure classes as Curry's lectures did. I did not become the fashion.

Curry did not come to call on me in my new home.

But Miss Dorothy Renzheimer did. One May morning, about three weeks after I had left the Academy, when I was in my front garden planting flowers, Miss Renzheimer, seeing me in passing, turned her car at the corner and came to my gate.

"May I come in and talk to you?" she asked, and as we walked together up the flagstone path to the front porch, I observed that the harassed, haggard countenance she had worn every time I had seen her during the past weeks was relieved this morning by a bright, eager hopefulness. Her words fairly leapt over each other in imparting to me her good news.

"I've got you to thank for doing Eugene a good turn!" she exclaimed happily as we sat on the porch sipping the hot coffee which my Chinaman brought to us; for I had been so interested in my planting that I had forgotten to eat any breakfast. "You sure have brought luck to he and I!" she cried, the slight affectation of elegance in her accent making her grotesque English all the more fantastic.

"Some mistake," I disclaimed responsibility for their "luck." "I've done nothing. Haven't seen Curry in three weeks."

"Oh, I know you didn't do it on purpose, but it's your doing all the same that everything's sure going to come all right now for Eugene and I."

Now as the kernel of interest for me in this affair was neither Curry nor Dorothy, but the unknown Nancy whom my hectic fancy had been quite unwarrantably idealizing, I barely restrained myself at this instant from exclaiming, "Then is Nancy dead at last?" Fortunately I choked off the question in time, wondering, as I waited for Miss Renzheimer to explain herself, whether, in case Nancy had *not* mercifully died, Dorothy's triumph meant the tragic undoing of the little village teacher.

"What's up?" I inquired. "And what have I to do with it? Have you come to an understanding with Curry at last?"

"No," she shook her head, her look of anxious care re-

turning for a moment, "but I'm bound to, now, right away. That is, if it's only his pride and poverty that's been holding him off. You know he's the very soul of honor!—and of course if he thinks it's not hon'rabable to marry me when he can't support me the way I'm accustomed to, why, then, to be sure, as soon as he *is* well-fixed enough, we can get married right away!"

"Has he come into a fortune?—and where on earth do I come in?"

"Listen and leave me tell you! You see, Granddad was awfully taken back and upset the way the boys raised a hullabaloo when you were fired out of the Academy; he never dreamed that so many of the boys and even some of the teachers would go and get balky on him and take your part! And he hates like anything the lectures you give here in your house." She suddenly leaned towards me and spoke in a whisper. "I'll tell you something if you won't give me away—he's going to have your house watched the nights you lecture, and discharge every workman that attends 'em!"

"Thanks for the tip. They shall come masked. Go on with your story, please."

"Well, you know Granddad thinks Eugene's another one just like you—full of ideas that are upsetting to the laboring people. But Granddad's learned a lesson—he's not going to make a second mistake, he says, and throw out a man as popular as Eugene is. He says he's going to take another tack with Eugene. He says if he'd known what he knows now, he'd have taken this other tack with *you*, and then he'd *have* you! He's going to (mind you, without my asking him to—he don't know a thing about Eugene and me)—he's going to make the trustees elect Eugene Head Master!"

"Buy him off?"

"Well, to be sure, if he's Head Master, he won't want to damage the school the way you tried to, Mr. Appleton! Not that I give a darn for your damaging it—don't misunderstand me about that. I'm not interested in the old school except as it matters to Eugene and I. I'm just on my way now to the Academy to prepare Eugene for what's coming to him!" she said, her face radiant. "Isn't it spiffy! I want to be the first to tell him! Head Master of the Academy yet! And him barely thirty years old! Isn't it fine and dandy?"

"It will ruin him!"

"Why?" she demanded, aghast.

"On second thoughts, no. It won't." I did not add, "Because you can't 'ruin' an egg that's already rotten!"

"And your grandfather thinks, does he, that I, too, could have been bought off?"

"Well, to be sure, he knows you don't need the salary or the honor like Eugene does. Still, he says, he could have found *some* kind of a bait to get you."

"None so alluring, I think, as a man's intellectual and spiritual freedom. 'He that loseth his life shall find it.'"

Dorothy shook her head. "I don't get you. Too high-brow. I'm awful dumb! You've got to talk plain and simple to little Dotty, Mr. Appleton! Well," she concluded, "you know, now, why it's you we've got to thank for our luck!"

A touch of pity stirred me as I considered her bright young hopefulness that was possibly destined, within the next hour, to be laid in the dust.

"My dear girl, don't be too confident! Doesn't it seem rather obvious that it has been something else than the money question which has been making Curry act so strangely?"

She turned white. "You know what it is?" she asked piteously. "Tell me! Oh, do tell me, Mr. Appleton!"

"I don't know. And if I did, don't you see, my dear, that it is not for me, but for him to tell you?"

"I believe you know something!" she said miserably.

"I'm as puzzled as you are. I've not once spoken to him alone since he came back over a month ago. But," I said indignantly, "it's intolerable that he should keep you in misery like this! He must explain himself and at once! You must make him!"

"But I can't! I've pumped him and I've bawled and I've cussed!—and all I get is, 'Have patience, darling, and everything will come all right.'"

"Well, whether his new prospects will bring him to terms with you or not, it certainly ought to force an explanation from him."

She rose with an air of resolution. "I'm going up there to that Academy this minute and make him cough up whatever's on his chest if I've got to threaten him that I'll go straight to Granddad with my tale of woe if he don't!"

"Stop in on your way back and tell me how you make out, if you feel like it, "I crassly suggested as I helped her into her car.

"Sure I will! You're just wonderf'ly sympathetic!" she said gratefully, a bit of huskiness in her voice that made me, pacifist though I was, feel like cowhiding that sleek Curry for making two young girls suffer so much on account of his damnable charm.

CHAPTER V

SHE did not stop on her way back. An hour later, while I was working at my writing table which I had fitted up on my porch, I saw her car dash by at an unlawful speed. Whether this indicated good or ill for her, I could not decide.

During all the following week I did not see her again.

One evening the *Gazette* announced in large type that Curry had been elected by the Board of Trustees of the Leitersville Academy to be its new Head Master. Space was given in the newspaper to testimonials from various women's clubs and from the student body as to the new Master's popularity in the town as well as in the school.

I watched thereafter in the streets for a glimpse of Dorothy Renzheimer, knowing that one look into her betraying face would enlighten me as to whether or not she had at last learned her fate at the hands of her recalcitrant lover.

But my first sight of her was during a dramatic, if awkward, meeting between her and Curry at my own gate. I had been reading on my porch in the cool of an early May evening, when a car stopping at my house made me look up—to see Miss Renzheimer spring from her car and start to walk across the sidewalk to my gate—and it was at that moment that Curry, coming down the street, suddenly and quite unexpectedly came face to face with her, unescapably, on my pavement. Ignoring him, she started to open the gate, but he quickly put out his hand to check her. She drew away aggressively, almost spite-

fully, and glared at him furiously, while he, looking agonized, pleaded with her.

I did not hear what they said; their voices were pitched low; but I caught the fact that their tones were tense.

I rose and went slowly down the walk to invite them in.

Curry looked painfully embarrassed as I held out my hand—as indeed I felt he had cause to do on more than one count!

“Sorry I haven’t time—thank you,” he declined my invitation. “Won’t you—think better of it, Dorothy?” he falteringly, though with an assumption of grave earnestness, asked the girl.

For answer, she flounced through the gate which I held open and stood defiantly at my side—at which Curry hastily lifted his hat, turned away and went quickly down the street.

“Dirty dog!” cried the girl vindictively, as I led her back to the porch. “Trying to coax me not to come in here and tell you! No wonder he’s ashamed to have you know!”

Somehow, with my mental picture of the misery in Curry’s fine, sensitive face, as I had just now seen it, I could not sympathize quite so much with this buxom, angry girl as I found myself pitying him. Whatever his fault, and because of it of course, his suffering must be so much keener and subtler than hers could possibly be!

And yet, in my heart I knew that it was for himself, and not for the pain he inflicted on others, that he suffered.

“Ashamed to have me know what?” I asked.

“That he’s *married*. Been married for six weeks!”

“My dear girl!” I exclaimed in quick compassion, even while my stronger feeling went forth instinctively to the girl that was Curry’s wife. For certainly her

plight must be the more tragic. "He has a—a living wife?" I stammered.

"Living!" she repeated. "So, then, you did know all along! And you swore you didn't!"

"I knew so little! He told me he was going to the bedside of a dying girl to whom he had been engaged—with whom he had meant to break his engagement—who now wanted him to marry her on her death-bed. Whether or not he did marry her—whether she recovered or died—I had not been told."

"You might have told me what you did know!"

"I had no right to tell you what was told me in confidence. And there was nothing definite to tell."

"Well, *she didn't die!*" cried Dorothy vindictively. "After he went and married her, she *got well!*—when he never would have married her, she's so beneath him, if he hadn't had the doctor's word for it that she couldn't live! Now what do you think of that?"

"That she's damned unlucky!"

"*Her* unlucky! Hasn't she got what she wanted?"

"I'm inclined to think she has not. And neither, as you know, has Curry, since he wanted to marry you. He is as much a victim as you are. It's unjust to call him 'a dirty dog' since his only mistake was his compassion for a dying girl who loved him."

"Who tricked him into marrying her because she knew she'd never get him any other way!"

"Does he say that?"

"No, but *I* say it! She bribed that doctor all right!"

"A poor school teacher? She couldn't afford to, Miss Dorothy."

"Well, if she didn't bribe him, she fooled him! I'll bet you she knew well enough she wasn't dying!"

"The more probable theory is that love and happiness made her get well."

"A lot of love and happiness she'll have, married to a man that doesn't want her!"

"Exactly. Don't you see how much worse her plight is than yours?"

"Well, I'll do my darn best to make it *more* worse! A pleasant time she'll have in this town—*not*! None of *my* friends will notice a girl that had to rope in a man by a death-bed fake!"

"But he was engaged to her, you know."

"She must have smelled a rat that he was getting tired of her!—and so she got up this dirty, rotten plot to *nail* him! Gee, I'll make her sorry for it!"

I leaned back in my wicker chair, folded my arms and looked out morosely over the darkening lawn. I wished the wench would take herself off and not waste my time. Her vulgar spite killed all my interest in her trouble.

Coarse-grained as she was, she nevertheless felt at once my cold withdrawal, but it only goaded her to an uglier resentment.

"*I'm* not the sort to turn the other cheek to any one that does me dirt! Well, I guess not! I've got some spunk!"

I made no comment.

"I'll do all *I* can to make it hot for her here!"

This, also, failed to elicit a reply from me.

"She'll certainly get a freeze-out in this town! There won't be any of *my* acquaintances that won't have heard of that fake death-bed before the bride arrives next fall!—and won't they give her the ha-ha!"

I remained silent.

"And under her very eyes I'll vamp Eugene Curry till I've got her that crazy-jealous that—"

"Don't be so damned common!" I checked her tirade in a bored tone.

"Well! I like that!"

"Why do you try to make me think you are a girl from whom Curry has made a happy escape? Because you're not, you know. You're far, far above such ill-bred spite!"

"Oh, no, I'm not! Don't you fool yourself!"

"I don't fool myself. Why, no common factory girl that hasn't had *your* chance to learn something, would stoop to the mean acts you're threatening!—acts which would harm you so much more than they could possibly harm your victim!"

I was, of course, pleading for Nancy under the guise of being interested in the morale of Miss Renzheimer.

"Victim! It's me's the victim, I should think! And 'mean acts'! How about *her* mean act in fooling my fiancé under false pretenses—"

"Come, come," I scoffed, "what makes you think she knew any more of your existence than you knew of hers? I imagine, from what Curry told me, that the girl had no idea he had stopped caring for her; no least suspicion that he was planning to break with her. If that is true, *can't* you see how much worse off she is than you are? Would you change places with her?"

"Yes, I would! She has Eugene, hasn't she? And what have I got?"

"Would you want him as she has him?"

"I'd sooner have him that way than not at all!" she sullenly answered. "What have *I* got?" she repeated.

"Your freedom and honor and self-respect—unless you sacrifice them to this disgusting spite towards a

young thing much more to be pitied than you are. The loss of Eugene Curry isn't irremediable!"

"Yes, it is! *I* never saw any one like him! *Every* one thinks he's perfectly fascinating!"

"What did he mean by telling you to have patience and everything would come right?" I asked. "Is he thinking of divorcing his wife?"

"She had double pneumonia and even yet they think if she's not careful she might have a relapse."

"So he bids you hope for the best with patience? And yet you would add to the bitterness that that poor young wife of his, whom he wishes dead, will come to feel!"

She began to look less vindictive. "If you're sure she didn't suspect about me—"

"I'm sure she didn't," I said with a confidence I didn't feel. "But any way, Curry was engaged to her first. Has your grandfather been told of the new Head Master's matrimonial vagaries?"

"You bet I told him!—though it's awful hard to intrust Granddad in anything that don't bear directly on business.

"And how did he take it?"

"How'd he take it?" she indignantly exclaimed. "Said he was only too glad Eugene was already married, because he wouldn't for anything have a relation for Head Master, for a relation could take advantage and get out of hand, while a man with no claim on him would have to toe the mark. See?"

"I do."

"So he's going to have the Head Master's house on the campus re-papered and painted, this summer vacation, for the new mistress that will be brought here next September," she added bitterly.

"Poor little country girl, how will she fill the bill?" I said seeing in fancy Curry's sensitive suffering at her social "unfitness"; for the position of Head Master's wife really called for some sophistication.

"Yes, I guess she's a hayseed all right from what Eugene says! I told Granddad she'd disgrace the school! But he said, 'Trust Curry to keep her in the background if she's as green as all that!' He offered to send me to Paris to get over it, but I told him Paris Nothing! I'll stay right here and pay out that— Oh, well!"—she thought better of it and her tone changed from angry resentment to a dull sullenness. "Maybe that poor fish *has* got the worst of it, as you say."

"Be assured of that!"

"And anyway," she added listlessly, "sometimes I think nothing in the world matters enough to make a fuss about it!"

"Sometimes I think so too, Miss Dorothy."

"You and I *are* awf'ly congenial together, aren't we?" she suddenly remarked on a note of pleased surprise.

I took the alarm. "But I'm naturally brutal and quarrelsome and selfish, sorry to say," I admitted.

She regarded me doubtfully; "Now you wouldn't like any one else to give you such a character—you know you wouldn't. Eugene never said you were like that!"

"People are apt, you know, to turn only their best side to Eugene, so noble and pure-hearted as he is!"

"I half believe you're kidding!"

"I didn't know you had a suspicious nature."

"Anyway," she said, looking me over appraisingly, "your wife won't have to worry about other women running after you."

Far from meaning this as a disparagement of my personal charm, I saw that she considered it a valuable mat-

rimonial asset and that I would have to put out all my defenses.

"I, too, value peace of mind," I said, "and shall marry a woman so unalluring that I shan't ever have to keep an eye on her."

"I didn't mean," said the simple maiden apologetically, "that you aren't attractive! Quite the contrary, Mr. Appleton," she graciously reassured me, "as I've heard more'n one girl say and lots of married women too. But your wife could sure trust you. Other women would know there was no *use* trying to vamp you, once you were married. Not that I mean you're a cold-blooded fish! Not by any means! But somehow any one would know that you just couldn't be tricky!"

"And you feel that Eugene could be—tricky?" I asked, interested.

"He hasn't got your kind of a jaw! Not that he'd *want* to go wrong any more than you would, but—"

Here at last she pricked my egotism. "Don't attribute to me, please, the vulgar moral inhibitions of a Sunday School Superintendent! 'Wouldn't want to go wrong!' You sound like a Salvation Army street talker!"

"Well, would you want to go wrong?" she callously repeated.

"I don't know anything about right and wrong—I only know that I hate ugliness of every brand, whether physical or what you call 'moral.'"

"Well, then," she persisted, "your wife could depend on your hating 'mor'l ugliness'—such as falling for every pretty girl that cast a Come-Hither eye at you! I wouldn't ask more! And, you know, there's something sort of severe and forbidding about you—women don't try to flirt with you—a person sort of stands in awe of you—"

"Not too much in awe to dissect me to my face and probe into all the secret places of my soul! Don't probe *too* deep, Miss Dorothy, or you might find something *you'd* call ugly!"

"One job your wife will have on her hands!" she nodded astutely. "To brake you of your 'ugly' habit of looking and talking all the time as if you were making fun of a person!"

She rose to go. "So, then," she said as we started down the walk to the gate, "you think it won't hurt my dignity any if I drop my schemes for paying back that girl for what she's done to me?"

"I think you can richly afford to be generous to her who has so much the worst of it."

"You do have queer ideas about things! I'd have thought I'd be lowering myself not to try to give her as good as she sent!—that it would be beneath my dignity not to spurn her after what she did!"

"And I call *that* a very queer idea indeed!" I smiled.

"I see now, a little, what the Academy boys mean when they say you gave them 'new standards.' Well, I don't like ugly things either, and I suppose paying people back isn't exactly—well, pretty."

"No, it isn't 'pretty,'" I agreed as I helped her into her car and closed the door.

"But," she concluded, her face flushing and the fire of revenge again lighting her eyes for an instant, "if she turns out to be pretty and attractive, then good-by to your high marl standards, Mr. Appleton! That's something I *couldn't* stand!"

She touched the accelerator and her car flew down the road.

CHAPTER VI

THAT strange coincidences do happen sometimes outside of moving pictures, I offer the following as evidence.

An afternoon of the ensuing August found me the victim of an automobile accident, laid up with a sprained knee in the home of a young New Mennonite farmer who, with the aid of his husky wife, had carried me from the roadside into his house close by. The doctor whom the farmer had summoned from the near-by village of Virginsville had, after treating my bruises and binding up my ankle, pronounced me unqualified to move for a week and had left me comfortably settled in a downstairs room of the farm house; "the spare room," the farmer's girlish wife called it; a typical Pennsylvania German bed-chamber; dustless, spotless cleanliness, a rag carpet, a high feather-bed (which the doctor had mercifully ordered to be placed under instead of over the mattress) furniture painted a sticky gray and nauseatingly decorated with brown flowers and incredibly bright green leaves, against a background of red and yellow wall-paper—a fearful riot of gruesome colors; weird family photographs framed and hung at regular intervals about the walls.

It was while I lay on my back, weak, but quite at ease, wondering what would be the dire effect upon my character of contemplating for a whole week such a combination of lurid red, green, yellow, brown, gray; realizing that the photographs would be an added anguish—that my eye was caught by something which seemed rather exotic and incongruous in this setting—a framed Prince-

ton College diploma just beside my bed. The name engraved upon it was *Elypholate Curry*; the date just five years ago.

And then suddenly I saw, fastened just below the diploma, the photograph of a young man in college cap and gown, presumably the "Elypholate Curry" of the diploma—whom, with a sharp shock, I recognized as the Head Master-elect of the Leitersville Academy—Eugene Curry! As handsome as a young god!

But how about that fantastic name "Elypholate"? Well, of course any one afflicted with the name "Elypholate" would change it. But why had he allowed it to go on his diploma?

The members of this household whom I had already met, the young farmer wearing the grotesque garb of his religious sect, his stout wife who adhered to "worldly" dress, and his plump little Mennonite mother who looked like a fat partridge, were all crude, kindly Pennsylvania Germans of the peasant type, and it seemed bizarre to me that Eugene Curry, cultured, polished, fastidious and pretentious, could have come from a home like this. The only manifestation I had ever observed in him of a humble origin had been his snobbishness, a form of vulgarity which had not suggested a background of such rural simplicity as that of a Mennonite farmer's family.

All at once I recalled the frequent letters Curry had received last spring bearing the post-mark "Virginsville," addressed in a literary handwriting which I had guessed to be "Nancy's" and which had always brought to his face a look of cold resentment. "Virginsville" was the name of the village just two miles distant from this farm house.

Would I possibly encounter Eugene Curry and his bride here during my enforced stay in this house? I rather

shrank from witnessing the humiliation which such a meeting would certainly cause a man of Curry's caliber—though if he could only know how little I was affected by worldly rather than human values, he might really be glad to see me.

My suspense, during the next hour, as to whether or not he and his wife were spending the summer vacation in this neighborhood, or perhaps under this very roof where I so unexpectedly found myself, stimulated my already shocked nerves rather unwholesomely.

A supper of "ponhaus" (scrapple) "smear case" (cream cheese) "spread" (apple butter) fried ham and coffee was brought to me at five o'clock by the young farmer's stout little mother and I was glad she remained to wait on me and chat with me while I ate.

Although she was a bland, placid, phlegmatic woman of sixty, I now saw that her resemblance to Eugene was unmistakable; so much so that I had an amused sense of looking at his face framed in that white Mennonite cap. I could not doubt that she was his mother. There was only one important difference between her countenance and his—her face was as open as a child's.

As she gently rocked in the big gray-brown-green chair at the bedside (which matched the sticky-looking bed, bureau and washstand) she discussed exhaustively every phase of my accident; talking in a steady monotonous stream, with scarcely a pause, repeating every word of the long argument she had had with Weesy, her daughter-in-law, as to which of them had heard the crash first; reveling in a minute description of my bloody, smashed aspect when found in the road; telling just how Weesy thought it had happened; how she differed with Weesy's theory; what "Yi" thought more likely—

"'Yi'?" I repeated questioningly.

"Uriah's his name," she explained. "My younger son; the one that helped his wife, Weesy, to fetch you in here. Yes, a many ugly accidents happens with them onman-nerly ottomobiles! Why, here last summer a boy fifteen years old was kilt at that wery spot out there where you was hurt! Yes, mind if he wasn't! Without a minute's warnin' ushered into Eternity! It was awful sa-ad! I say still to Weesy, 'Ain't it sa-ad, Weesy, about that there poor young boy?' To be ushered into Eternity unpurpared! Och, but it is, now, awful sa-ad! Yes, the accident itself would be bad enough without goin' before your Maker unpurpared; ain't? Yes, me, I often say to Weesy, I say, 'It's awful sa-ad about that young boy dyin' unpurpared. This here ought to be a lesson to the young,' I still say to Weesy, 'to get purpared and not follow so much after pleasure-seekin' and frivol'ty.' Fur what's Time towards Eternity? Ain't?"

"What indeed?" I acquiesced.

"What's your first name?" she suddenly inquired to my surprise. I told her and she explained, "Us Men-nonites we darsent use Mr. or Mrs. or titles or pay no sich compliments, but our speech must be plain and true. So you must excuse me if I call you—*what* is it now? Herrick," she repeated after me. "That name ain't familiar with me. It's a funny name; ain't? *Do* you mind if I call you Herrick then?—or are you proud and must be called Mister?"

I assured her of my abject lack of pride.

"Is that another son of yours?" I indicated the photograph hanging under the Princeton diploma.

She nodded, sending an awed, almost timid glance towards the picture. "Yes, that there's our Elypholate." (She pronounced the word 'our' "ah-ver.") "And there's his diar-plomy," crooking her thumb backwards at the

framed document. "Lypholate's awful high-educated," she shook her head disparagingly. "Full much so! I never favored him taking so much schoolage. I sayed to him when he wanted to go to college, 'No, Lypholate, you kin read plenty good enough a'ready without goin' to college yet.' But he wouldn't listen on me. To college he must go. And Lottie, my eldest dotter, she upheld to it too, fur Lottie's good educated herself and she sayed she knowed the value of schoolage. A Millersville Normal grad-yate, ah-ver Lottie is, and awful high-minded that way and appreciates herself wonderful! But I sayed to her, 'Yes, but, Lottie,' I sayed, 'it was different, too, again, when your Pop was alive to pay fur you at Millersville Normal, but me I'd have to mortgage the farm to send Lypholate; and college costs even more expensive yet than Millersville Normal,' I says. And Lottie she sayed if I'd mortgage the farm and send Lypholate to college, she'd school teach and help pay off the mortgage. So I give in. And after all, Lottie she couldn't help any, fur she up and got married. Yi he farms the place since my man died fur me, and Yi he sayed if I'd now deed it over to him, he'd pay off the mortgage. So, then, seein' I could never pay it off myself, I deeded it over to Yi. And now," she mourned, "I don't have nothin' no more and am dependent on my children. But," she added wistfully, "I put my trust in Gawd. I guess He'll take care of me and not leave me come to want in my old age."

"Of course He won't," I said reassuringly, "not with two grown sons and a daughter to take care of you."

"I don't know," she returned doubtfully. "You see, Lypholate's so high up in the world and college has got him so genteel that he has to live awful grand—and that costs so expensive that he ain't never been able to pay me

back any fur his grand education that I gave him. And you see my children's all married now and got their own expenses. Now that Lypholate's married too, I guess he'll *never* be able to pay me back," she ended hopelessly.

I wondered whether his indebtedness to his mother had had anything to do with "Elypholate's" desire to marry Dorothy Renzheimer's great fortune.

"But," I suggested, "you must be proud of your son's success."

"But me I'm a New Mennonite and pride ain't fur us. And Lypholate's so genteel, I guess I seem wery common to him, and he has ashamed a little of me and Yi and Weesy. But of Lottie not. Lottie's awful high-toned, like ah-ver Lypholate. Her man he's a musicianer; he teaches music to the public schools at Columby. Yes, that high up ah-ver Lottie married yet! She has ashamed a little, too, I guess fur her Mennonite Mom. But och, how she has proud fur her brother Lypholate! Yes, anyhow! That's why it got her so mad that Nancy Sherwin ketched him—Lottie she didn't think Nancy was near good enough fur ah-ver Lypholate. To be sure, Lypholate could o' did a lot better. And seeing how much his education cost yet, he had *ought* to have did better too. And he was always so high-minded that way, after he'd been to college a'ready, and never would make hisself common with the folks 'round here, so much he respected hisself; and so we all conceited he'd look wery high fur a wife, and when he got runnin' with a country teacher, us *we* didn't think he meant it fur really. And I don't think he *did* neither. He just got took in. You see, Nancy she persuaded Lypholate to marry her on her death-bed and then didn't she disappoint him by gettin' well on him! To be sure, that'd get any man a little sore, knowin' he could o' did so much better'n her!"

"Why did she want to do it—to get married when she thought she was dying?"

"Well, sometimes I think Nancy she just hated the idea of havin' *Miss* on her tombstone."

I thoughtfully contemplated this, to me, quite novel reason for matrimony. "But did she know that Elypholate would not have married her if he'd supposed she'd get well?"

"That I couldn't answer fur the reason that I don't know."

She picked up a pitcher of water to refill my glass. "Do you feel fur a drink?"

"Thank you. Is Nancy any more satisfied with her marriage than Elypholate is?"

"Well, I guess she kin well be!—seein' how high above her Lypholate is! Her a poor girl earnin' her own livin' with no home and no folks! She done grand and she knows it. Yes, she thinks very high of Lypholate. Oncet I tole her, when she was sayin' how grand she thinks Lypholate is, 'But when all's said, Nancy, he's only a man *then*,' I says. And she said, 'I think he's a gawd!' Yes, mind you if she didn't say that! 'I think he's a gawd,' she said. And I says, 'Och, Nancy, Lypholate ain't near like Gawd, he's only my son, when all's said, and it's only his grand education that's got him lookin' so genteel. If it wasn't fur his schoolage, he wouldn't be no different from ah-ver Yi,' I says. Yi he never hankered after an education like both my dotter Lottie and both my son Lypholate did. Yi he purferred to stay ignorant. He takes after me. I never missed it any, not havin' schoolage. I'm more contented so. Fur all my childern, when they got so book-learnt, fell away from the New Mennonite faith, but Yi not."

"Nancy isn't, of course, a Mennonite?"

"Och, no, she belongs to the world's people. There Lypholate *would* have drawed the line, at marryin' a Mennonite!—death-bed or no death-bed! He's too high-minded."

"But she's a Pennsylvania Dutch girl of this neighborhood; isn't she?"

"No, she comes from else. She's a foreigner—from Phil-delphy or wherever—I don't rightly know what place. She don't even speak her words like us. She speaks her words like *you* do. Awful funny it sounds, the way yous foreigners talk! The way yous say *buttah* fur butter-r. Why," she asked, puzzled, "don't yous talk *right*?"

"But what can you expect, Mrs. Curry, of poor foreigners? Do you like Nancy?"

"Whether I like her? Well, it makes nothing if *I* like her or if I don't; it's whether Lypholate likes her—ain't? Och, she's all right, I guess. Yes, she's a wery nice lady. Lottie she's awful agin her though! Lottie she can't bear to think what Lypholate missed. She says he could o' did so much fur her and her man if he'd married that there girl he *could* o' got over at Leitersville. Then he could o' got Lottie's man a good job."

I wondered how I should break it to her that I knew her son.

"Is Elypholate stopping here this summer with his wife?—or near here?"

"Yes, they're stoppin' here at the farm with us. They're off to-day in ah-ver Ford. They went to Columby over. That's where Lottie lives. Nancy she didn't want to go with. Because she says ah-ver Lottie don't like her. But Lypholate he wanted her along. He's awful funny about her. Fur all he's so mad he married her, yet he wants her round him all the time.

Seems he can't stop lookin' at her and can't keep his hands off her, and yet she don't near suit him, fur he's all the time pickin' at her and findin' fault with her."

"What about?"

"Well, I don't always rightly understand, but mostly, I guess, it's because she ain't stylish enough to suit him. I guess mebby that's why he wanted her to go along to Lottie's, so's she could copy Lottie and know how she must act when she gets to Leitersville; fur ah-ver Lottie's awful tony, that way. And Lottie's to live at Leitersville too, fur Lypholate's given' her man Elmer, a teachin' job in the Macademy where Lypholate's the boss now; a better job than what Elmer's got a'ready. Tha's why Lypholate went to see 'em to-day—to talk about the new job Elmer's to have at the Macademy, soon's the summer vacation's over oncet."

I thought of that poor Nancy living in Leitersville surrounded by enemies—her sister-in-law, Dorothy Renzheimer, and all the other disappointed women who had romantically adored "Elypholate!" I realized also that Lottie must indeed be educated far above her family if her brother was willing to have her at Leitersville.

"Mebby you seen in the noospaper what a grand job ah-ver Lypholate's got, heh?" Mrs. Curry asked me. "It reads in the noospaper all about it. And ah-ver Lypholate's pitcher was in the paper yet!" she exclaimed, manifesting, for the first time, a shade of maternal pride. "His name and his pitcher printed out in the noospaper! Yes, anyhow if it wasn't! I says to Weesy when I seen it, 'Och, Weesy,' I says, 'if only Lypholate's Pop had of lived to see it! His own son's pitcher in the noospaper and Pop him so common yet!' Yes, Pop he never conceived sich a thing could happen to one of his sons—gettin' his pitcher in the noospaper! Lypholate bought his-

self a new overcoat with fur at, to wear fur the pitcher, and he wore a cane on him. *Did* you see that there pitcher?"

"Yes, I saw it; but the name was not Elypholate, it was Eugene," I said inquiringly.

"Och, well, you see, till Lypholate had went to college a year a'ready, he changed his name. The name Lypholate wasn't tony enough to suit him. He sayed the boys at college poked fun at his name and called him Elephant and Elizabeth and Elisha and it give him sich a shamed face fur his name!"

"But why, then, isn't the name Eugene on the diploma?"

"Well, you see, he had give his right name when he first went to college, so the boss, or whoever, wouldn't change it on the diar-plomy."

She rose to take away my tray. "I got to go now and spritz."

"'Spritz'! What's that?"

"Spritz my flowers."

She saw that I looked unenlightened. "With such a hose," she explained. "It didn't give no rain here all week and my flowers will die on me if I don't spritz 'em."

"I'm glad my window overlooks your gay flower garden, Mrs. Curry."

"Yes, well, but you must excuse the way my flower garden looks. It's all over grasses. I got so much housework, I can't get at and weed my garden oncet. I says to Weesy, I says, 'Ah-ver flower garden will soon look so weedy and overgrown, Weesy,' I says, 'like Diffenderfer's, that their landlord he got so disgusted he shifted 'em!'"

Here again I looked blank. "Made them move out?" I feebly suggested.

"Yes, mind if he didn't!"

"Well, that can't happen to you, since you own your place and don't rent it from a landlord."

"But it's Yi owns it now; not me no more," she said sadly, "fur all Pop he inherited it to me when he died. Och, well!"

She drew a long, deep breath, as she turned from my bedside, that made me feel very sorry for the helpless old creature. Evidently she did not have much faith in the filial affection and duty of her three children.

As I lay alone in the gathering twilight, I had plenty of food for thought.

It occurred to me to be thankful that I had settled in advance, before Eugene's return, the financial business of my stay here, as that transaction would have proved, no doubt, an added humiliation to him.

"If he could only realize," I thought, "that the only humiliating thing there could possibly be in this whole situation would lie in his way of taking it!"

CHAPTER VII

URIAH and his wife, Weesy, before they went to bed at the early hour of eight, came into my room to see whether I needed anything.

In the monotony of their lives, my unlooked-for presence here was evidently enormously interesting. Their wide-eyed curiosity over me, their reveling in the recounting of every minute detail of my accident and the discovery of it by Weesy (who denied her mother-in-law's claim to having heard the crash first) were a commentary upon the spiritual poverty of their lives.

Though Uriah bore a fraternal likeness to Eugene, he was a lumpish, loutish young man with none of his brother's fineness of feature; his face, like his mother's, expressed a childlike openness, without a hint of that subtlety and even guile that lurked in Eugene's veiled eyes.

Weesy was a rosy-cheeked, cow-eyed, heavily-built young matron with a touch of sulkiness in her voice and about her red lips that was oddly and rather absurdly attractive.

I tried to steer the conversation away from the quite exhausted theme of my accident, around to themselves.

"How is it," I asked Mrs. Yi, "that you are not a Mennonite like your husband?"

This question precipitated upon me a long account of how Uriah had got round the New Mennonite law that forbade marriage outside the faith, by holding off from "giving himself up" (that is, joining the New Mennonites) until *after* his marriage.

"And now," pouted Weesy, "he's all the time worryin' that he's afraid Gawd seen into it how he done it a-purpose—put off bein' born again and joinin' meetin' till after he *had* me a'ready—seein' he darsent of married me at all if he'd turned plain first."

"Yes," said Uriah hopelessly, "I didn't blind Gawd none by marryin' first and givin' myself up afterwards—just so's I could have the girl I wanted even if she *was* an *onbeliever*! I tried," he accused himself bitterly, "to come it over Gawd! That there was no game to come on Gawd, I see it now!"

"He's all the time plaguin' me to give myself up too, so's he won't be onekally yoked together with an *onbeliever*."

"And why don't you?" I asked.

"*Me!* Turn plain! And not pomp my hair no more! And wear one of them black hoods yet, 'stead of a hat! No-p!" she shook her head. "The New Mennonites is too stric'. I couldn't hold out in sich a stric' life. I'd give way. If I ever do get religion (and I hope it won't be soon) I'd sooner join on to the Methodises. They don't bother you any if you follow the world a little."

"Methodises!" exclaimed Uriah darkly. "Methodises uphold to Sunday schools; and it ain't nothin' in the Scriptures about Sunday schools, Weesy."

"Och, well, but," retorted Weesy fretfully, "*I* can't take intrust in sich deep subjicks! Lee' me be!"

"You'd ought to care enough fur your husband to try to see the light. It's only us New Mennonites that's got the One True Way."

"Yes, well, but if Christ died just fur New Mennonites, that would be funny too again!"

"If you won't give yourself up, Weesy, *I'll* be lost!" said Uriah miserably.

"Well, then, what fur did you marry me if you knowed you'd go to hell fur it? Land's sakes!"

"It was your photy-grap done it! I could of kep' away from you if your photy-grap that you gimme hadn't of kep' me in mind of you! When I was strugglin' with the Enemy," he explained to me, "and tryin' awful hard to give Weesy up, the Enemy'd temp' me and say, 'You've kep' away from her now fur a month a'ready, but you kin anyhow look at her pretty face on her photy-grap oncet!' And that greedy I was fur a sight of her (ain't it funny how it gets you?) that I'd git out of bed in the night and make my lamp lit and look at her photy-grap. And she looked so pretty on her photy-grap that at last I sayed to the Enemy, 'The game's yourn. You won out! I choose everlastin' destruction sooner'n not have Weesy this side of Jordon!' So I married her quick!"

Weesy, I observed, did not seem disturbed at being regarded as a wife of Satan to lure her lover to "everlasting destruction."

"Yi had it made out to fool me as well as Gawd," she pouted, "fur to be sure, if I had of knew he would turn plain after we was married together, I wouldn't have married him! I'm too much fur pleasure-seekin' to join on to the New Mennonites. I like to be jolly a little!"

"There ain't nothin' jolly in Eternity, Weesy!" Uriah warned her with sepulchral solemnity.

"Och, don't make me so creep, Yi!"

"If it makes you so creep just to *think* about Eternity!" said Uriah somberly.

"But yous Mennonites yous look too comic in your plain clo'es!" objected Weesy. "Look how yous *comb* yet, yous Mennonites, with your hairs so cut acrost!" she

exclaimed, with an injured glance at her husband's bizarre hair and beard. "It's too comic!"

I could see that Weesy's oddly attractive pouting sullenness was not only a natural characteristic, but that it had an aggravating cause in Uriah's evidently fanatical determination to make her save his soul by joining his faith. I thought I foresaw tragedy here, in the man's brooding, superstitious fears.

It was Weesy who tried to change the subject. "Mom has so ashamed to have you see her flower garden look so through-other! Mom she'd sooner tend her flowers than eat! Ain't she would, Yi? But me, I ain't like that. I have so fond fur eatin' I'd anytime purfur a sandwich to a flower."

"Yes, well, if I was hungry I'd purfur a sandwich too," Uriah conceded.

"Och, but me, even if I was dead," exclaimed Weesy facetiously, "I don't want the folks to fetch flowers, but sandwiches!"

Uriah's abrupt shout of laughter at this pleasantry fairly startled me.

"Fetch sandwiches instead of flowers when you're dead a'ready!" he gasped hysterically—and Weesy joined him in boisterous and prolonged laughter over her joke.

He sobered up as abruptly as he had relaxed and looked more fanatically gloomy than before.

"You expect your brother Elypholate and his wife home to-night, don't you?" I inquired.

"Yes, they'll be comin' along most any time now," answered Uriah. "If you're asleep when they come, mebbey they'll git you waked up," he added solicitously. "That there Ford of ourn she makes so loud, still, when she comes."

"And Nancy and Lypholate sleeps in the room next this'n," said Weesy apprehensively, "and mebbby them not knowin' you're here, they'll talk and keep you awake."

"You better stick a note in their room, then, Weesy," advised Yi, "tellin' 'em about the accident and that they're to keep quiet."

"Och, me I write sich bum penmanship, Lypholate would laugh at it. And I don't know how to spell accident."

"Och, well, then," Uriah yielded the point.

"I bet you," said Weesy, nodding grimly, "Nancy didn't have no jolly day to-day wisitin' Lottie!—as spiteful as what Lottie feels towards her fur ketchin' Lypholate!"

"Yes," agreed Uriah, "and ah-ver Lottie she can be awful ugly when she puts her mind on it!"

"Can't she then!" Weesy heartily endorsed this brotherly statement.

"Perhaps your brother and his wife won't like your having taken me in," I suggested. "It may inconvenience them."

"Lypholate won't like it," Weesy frankly assented. "Nancy she ain't got no right to say nothin'. It ain't her affairs!"

"Neither is it Lypholate's, fur that matter," retorted Uriah. "I own this here place now and he owes Mom money!"

"And neither of 'em helps much with the work," Weesy complainingly expanded the theme to me with her peasant unreserve as to family matters. "Nancy wasn't raised to housework and she gives out awful quick. She ain't the help to me she'd ought to be."

"Yes, ah-ver Lypholate didn't do just so well when

he got *her*," said Yi. "She's a poor thing any way you look at it. She didn't bring him nothin', not even good, husky strength fur to housekeep fur him. He'll even mebbly have to *har* fur her yet!"

I was aware of the fact that in the mind of a Pennsylvania German farmer, to be obliged to "hire house-work" was about the worst grievance a husband could have against his legal "helpmate."

"The washin' anyhow he'll have to har," nodded Weesy. "Why, when Lypholate tol' her that she'd ought to do his and her washin' anyhow this summer whiles they're here in the country where no one would *see* her doin' it, she ak-shally cried! Then she tol' him she'd pay fur hirin' it done, with the money she'd saved from teachin'. But he tol' her what she saved ought to go towards a heap of other things—the swell clo'es she'll need in Leitersville and the doctor's bill fur her long sickness. And she sayed she'd sooner do without swell clo'es than 'drudge at the wash-tub' and her doctor's bill *was* paid. Lypholate was surprised she'd got her doctor's bill paid and awful relieved! You could tell it on him, how relieved he was, ain't, Yi? He conceited he'd have to pay it, seein' she was his wife whiles she was sick."

Had Eugene, I wondered, never outgrown the notorious frugality of the native Pennsylvania German? A wife "from else," a "foreigner from Philadelphia," would certainly find that penuriousness very hampering.

"Ah-ver Lypholate ought to put his foot down," pronounced Yi, "agin her hirin' her washin'!"

"Yes, well, it was Nancy put *her* foot down fur oncet and tol' him she wouldn't do the washin'! And I took notice that Lypholate don't ac' quite so high-minded to her since! I guess it ain't good, neither, to be *too* wifely!

It gits a man spoilt a little. Nancy she's most always too meek to Lypholate."

"Elypholate's wife," I remarked, "doesn't seem to have made a hit with any of you."

"Och, she's wery nice, so far forth as that goes," said Weesy, "even if she is a dopple about the house."

"What on earth is a 'dopple'?" I asked.

"Now think of that! Not knowin' what a dopple is! Why, a dopple is a doppling person; onhandy at the work. Why, here last Sundays Nancy she tried to make sich chocolate creams; she took and put most everything together, but it never give no chocolate creams!"

"And look how it wastes to spoil all that there sugar and chocolate! Tchh! Tchh!" said Uriah.

"I took and made icing fur my cake with it," Weesy consoled him. "But in some things Nancy's smart, too, and can give me good advices. I went by her advices how to trim around my Sunday hat and how to fix over my old Sunday frock. She ain't no dopple with the needle, fur all she's a wery plain dresser herself. She won't doll up fancy like us country girls. She don't even pomp her hair."

"Lottie says she's too plain a person fur ah-ver Lypholate," added Uriah, "him that could have married most anybody. But *I* say that there's the only good thing about her—that she ain't no fancy dresser."

"Still, I like her fur a sister-in-law better'n I like your sister Lottie," said Weesy, "fur even if Nancy and me ain't awful congenial together, she's anyhow nice dispositioned that way, and she don't look down on me like Lottie does. Fur a person that kin read so good and even school-teach yet, Nancy does make herself nice and common; that you got to give her, Yi."

Yi signified his lack of interest in this turn of the dis-

cussion by rising abruptly. "Come on, Weesy, along to bed. Did you mind to alarm the clock? If the rattler don't go off," he explained to me, "I oversleep my breakfast still."

I gathered that "still" meant occasionally.

It was odd, I reflected after they had gone, that in spite of all I had been hearing these many weeks about "Nancy," I had been unable to form any mental picture of her. I knew that my instinctive sympathy for her might well be misplaced. She seemed to stand to these people for nothing but a negation; she was plain, meek, submissive, inefficient, and she thought Elypholate "a god!"

"Like all the silly girls of Leitersville!" I concluded.

CHAPTER VIII

I DON'T know how long I had been asleep when I was awakened by the sound of a monologue in the next room—the tone, though remonstrating, reproving, yet smooth, gliding, saccharine.

It was, I soon recognized, the unusual, unmistakable voice of Eugene Curry.

I was thankful that I was spared the awkwardness of hearing what he was saying in his unconsciousness of my presence.

But after a time, as he continued, I found that that steady, even, unvarying stream, falling upon the night's deep silence, was beginning to penetrate—and an occasional phrase did come to me very distinctly, as the speaker, evidently moving about the room while he undressed, drew near, now and then, to the door beside which stood my bed.

“Lottie's sisterly ambitions for me”—“Stop complaining!”—“family's sacrifices”—“naturally disappointed”—“can't blame”—

I heard no feminine voice in response, the monologue continuing so steadily as to give the person addressed no chance to reply.

“Brilliant marriage”—“opportunities”—“Got to give Lottie time”—

Probably the bed in the next room was close to the wall where my own bed stood, for when at last the voice ceased, I heard almost at my ear, long-drawn, despairing sobs; pitiful, tearing sobs that expressed a depth of hopeless woe for which no man, it seemed to me, could endure being responsible.

Evidently he, too, found her grief unbearable, for now he spoke again, his voice near the wall—he was probably in bed, now, at her side; “Tired to death!—have peace—might be glad—”

The sobs ceased abruptly as though smothered in the pillow. For a space there was silence. Then presently, “Nancy dear!—Pet!”

After that the stillness remained unbroken.

But I could not get to sleep again for the questions that crowded upon my mind. Was Curry in the habit of bullying his wife? Well, a woman so poor-spirited as to tolerate bullying needed no pity; she probably loved it. Surely the best of men were tempted to bully creatures of no spirit. And few men would have the temerity to try it on a plucky woman.

I smiled in the darkness as I thought of Curry’s reputation among Leitersville ladies for his exquisite courtesy and chivalry. I recalled the feeling I had always had that his elegance of manner was a bit overstressed, not quite spontaneous. As he had been born and reared a Pennsylvania German, among whom the idea of using, rather than protecting and shielding, women prevailed, I could imagine how his first realization of the ways of the world towards “ladies” must have impressed him as strange and almost mysterious. Woman’s functions, under Providence, according to the Pennsylvania “Dutch” code, was to bear children and serve men. For that and that alone created He them. This was fundamental. To see men, then, making way for women, working for them, indulging and spoiling them, the women queening it over the men—how revolutionary it must have seemed to all Curry’s preconceived ideas of the relation of the sexes! A born Pennsylvania German, I felt sure, could never be chivalrous at heart, whatever concessions he

might make to a worldly custom (in which he did not really believe) by taking on a veneer of gallantry.

Suppose Curry had married a woman whom he considered above him—like Dorothy Renzheimer? Would even that have kept him from feeling that as his wife she was his inferior?

Why had I gathered the impression that Nancy was much less “common” than Dorothy Renzheimer? “She may be just a scheming, ignorant, vulgar girl and Curry may be justified in resenting her having trapped him.”

I fell to wondering how he would take it when, next morning, he would learn of my presence here. But I found myself quite at a loss. I could not imagine. And in my effort to picture it, sleep at last overtook me; the dreamless sleep of complete exhaustion.

CHAPTER IX

WHEN I awoke next morning the room was so flooded with sunshine that I did not need to look at my watch to know that this hard-working household must long have been astir. No sound came from the next room and the almost spectral silence of the country was unbroken by any signs of life in the house, for this room of mine was far from the kitchen where I knew the women of the Pennsylvania Dutch farmer's family stayed all day long, while the men worked in the fields.

At half past eight old Mrs. Curry brought me water for washing and a half hour later my breakfast.

"I hope your son Elypholate doesn't too seriously object to your having taken in a temporary boarder?" I said inquiringly, as she poured me a cup of coffee.

"He *couldn't* say much when Yi tol' him what you paid all, fur Lypholate he never pays nothing fur his own board when he stops here in the summers. To be sure he gives Weesy a little before he goes off to school-teach agin. But to Yi and me nothing. I sayed to Weesy, 'When Lypholate fetches his wife here, Weesy, then to be sure he'll pay you and Yi board money—a little anyhow.' But Lypholate he sayed he'd pay fur hisself by helpin' Yi out with his chores every day and Nancy she could earn her keep by helpin' Weesy with her work. But Nancy's sich a poor soul! Till she's stood at the ironing a couple hours, then right away she gives out a'ready. She's the poorest person to stand work I ever seen yet!"

The old woman bent towards me and whispered, "Don't leave on, but Nancy slips Weesy money every week fur her board—money she saved up from her school-teachin' wages. She don't want Lypholate to know, because he wouldn't like it that she pays it to Weesy. He'd want fur her to save it back. He don't even know she's got it!"

Was Nancy a coward and a sneak, I wondered?

"That school salary of Nancy's must have been munificent," I remarked, remembering all she was supposed to be doing with her mere savings after she had stopped teaching—pay her doctor, buy the outfit with which to impress Leitersville, employ a laundress, and now this weekly board to her sister-in-law.

"Magnificent?" repeated Mrs. Curry. "Yes, well, forty dollars a month it was."

"More elastic than magnificent then! Did you—did you tell Elypholate my name?" I asked in some embarrassment.

"No. He didn't ask what it was and I didn't get 'round to tell him."

"Is he—coming in to see me?"

"No, he said he'd take hisself off and keep out the way. He's went fishing. You see us we tol' him you was sich a rich educated person, that way, and Lypholate he's a little funny—he has ashamed a little fur educated folks to see him livin' so common. So he'll keep out the way," she nodded, "till you've went a'ready."

"But why, then, does he live here if he feels like that?" I wondered.

"It's cheap fur him."

"Rather!" I smiled. "It couldn't well be cheaper, could it?"

"Well, no, that it couldn't. Anywheres else that he

stayed he'd have to pay *somepin* anyhow. But ah-ver Lypholate he always was a little near that way."

If his own Pennsylvania Dutch mother called him "near"!

"Well," she concluded, "I can't set here conwersin', I have my yeast sat; and I darsent let my cookin' no longer."

I wondered, when she had left me, whether Elypholate would succeed in eluding me during the entire week of my stay. My mind dwelt upon the weird possibility of our meeting next winter in Leitersville without his having ever discovered that it was I who had been for a whole week the star boarder in the "spare room" of his brother's home!

The doctor's visit and some of Elypholate's books and periodicals which Mrs. Curry brought me at the suggestion, she explained, of Nancy, made the morning go fast enough; and at noon my dinner was carried in neither by Weesy nor old Mrs. Curry—but by one the sight of whom gave me the greatest shock of amazement I had ever experienced in my life.

CHAPTER X

WITH her eyes fastened upon the tray which she carried, as though by her fixed gaze to steady it and keep things from slopping over, she walked very slowly into my room, so that while she did not look at me until she reached my bedside, I had her in full view during all her slow progress across my chamber—my heart almost ceasing to beat, my eyes utterly incredulous of what they seemed to see—

If she should chance to look up at me before she put down that tray, the shock would make her drop it! I snatched up the newspaper that lay on the bed and held it before my face until she had safely placed her burden on the table.

Then, slowly, fearfully, I lowered it.

As our eyes met, she gasped, clutching at her breast, every drop of color leaving her face. Her eyes became suddenly glazed as though she were losing consciousness—but I caught her wrists.

“Nancy! My God! Don’t be frightened!” I tried to speak reassuringly before the wild terror in her eyes, though I was scarcely less shaken than she was.

“I’ll close the door,” her lips, stiff and colorless, formed the words.

She moved across the room, clinging weakly to bed, chairs and wall. In its utter unexpectedness, the shock of our meeting was agitating enough in all conscience, to me; so what must it be to her—

Closing and locking the door noiselessly, she came back to the bedside.

"You couldn't stand it to have the window closed too?" she whispered.

"It's so high above the ground—and we'll be careful—no, don't close it. Come here!"

She was trembling all over with fright. I drew her down upon the side of my bed and kept her hands in mine to give her whatever comfort and courage that friendly contact might yield—realizing how lovely she had grown in the three years since I had last seen her, a girl of seventeen. More interesting and distinguished looking than she was beautiful, was my swift impression, though I felt, rather than saw, that her coloring and her features were still delicately exquisite and her feminine charm obvious enough.

"Nancy, my dear, my dear! To discover you like this!"

"Oh, Herrick! You'll—you'll not tell them who I am?" she implored me piteously. "I've concealed myself so completely for three years from every one who ever knew me that I'd almost forgotten myself who I am! And now," she said despairingly, "here you've turned up! To bring it all back!"

"To help and protect you!" I soothed her, pressing the soft hands I held.

"To betray me, I'm afraid!—just when I was beginning to feel safe!"

"You're going to be a lot safer with me here to stand between you and some things!" I exclaimed. "You *need* a friend and protector badly enough, God knows, you poor, poor little wanderer! My god, I'm glad I discovered you!"

"But—but I have a friend and protector, Herrick dear—I'm—married!"

"To a man from whom you must conceal the truth about yourself, Nancy?"

"Herrick! If you should betray to my husband who I am! It would ruin his career—and crush the life out of me a second time!—just when I was beginning to live again!"

"But, my dear, of course I'll not betray you."

"Of course you wouldn't intentionally, I know—but you can so easily let it out accidentally! Oh, Herrick, please, please leave here just as soon as you are able!—and you *will* be awfully on your guard, while you are here, won't you?" she plead with me passionately, "not to let it out that we know each other? Promise! Promise not to let my husband find out!"

"Of course I won't let him find out. But I think you're making a big mistake, Nancy."

"No, no, you don't know my husband, Herrick!—he could not live under such disgrace! Do you suppose I would have married him or any man if I had not felt safe from discovery? You surely realize that it would ruin a man's future to have it known he had married Nancy—Claxton!"—She pronounced her notorious surname in a shuddering whisper that revealed to me how that black experience of deepest disgrace and anguish which had broken upon her life at its most sensitive period, just at the awakening of her womanhood, had scorched and branded her soul. "That is the very first time, Herrick, in three years that I have spoken that name! I hardly realize any longer that it ever was mine! That's why I didn't hesitate to marry—I seemed to have escaped that other identity—this life I've been living has been so wholly different—"

"I should say so!"

"And now your coming seems to drag me back! To

wipe out these three years that I've been living in peace among strangers!"

"My coming need not change anything except to give you comfort and help, Nancy dear! I insist that you need me. For old times' sake—for your dear mother's sake—you must let me befriend you."

The fear began to fade a little from her eyes, her face softened. "You dear!" she said gratefully. "You always were like a big brother to me! But—but just because I'm so awfully fond of you, Herrick, don't you see it's dangerous for you to be near me? I'm so apt to betray myself!"

"Probably you don't yourself realize, Nancy, how much you need a friend—"

"What do you mean, Herrick? You know nothing of my present life."

"You were so young and inexperienced to fare forth and wrestle with life!—and now this marriage of yours! So utterly beneath you—"

"Oh, but you don't know my husband! He isn't like the rest of the family here!"

"If he only were!" I exclaimed—but at the mingled indignation and amazement in her soft, troubled eyes, I stopped. "I do know him," I added quietly. "I live in Leitersville. I would have met you next winter in any case. Hasn't Eugene (or Elypholate, do you call him?) ever spoken of me to you?"

"You know him!" she breathed bewildered.

"I taught for six months at the Leitersville Academy, until they threw me out!"

"Oh! But I never dreamed that it was *you*, when Eugene told me of an Academy teacher named Appleton! Why, you're not a school teacher, Herrick!"

"Not now. I had to give it up. Because there's no

place in schools and colleges to-day for truth-tellers, you know."

"I know."

"Oh, you do, do you?" I asked, diverted momentarily from her more personal concerns to this matter of her opinions. She had always been a precociously thoughtful child, with a tendency, as she matured, to a rather impracticable idealism. I could understand so well her having "fallen for" Eugene; how his apparent spirituality, in contrast with the dark, sordid history she was hiding, had lured her.

"You were such a promising young person, Nancy—most interestingly inclined to think for yourself instead of the way you were told to think. Do you remember how I used to probe you to get at your young ideas about things? I often found them illuminating, child though you were, and I eight years older than you! My dear, I hope your awful experiences haven't squashed that independent thinking of yours!"

"'I am the sworn poet of every dauntless rebel, the world over!'" she quoted. "You see," she eagerly added, the tragic sadness of her face lifting a bit, "that was the bond at first between Eugene and me—my sympathy with his fearless, thoughtful way of looking at life. You and he ought to be very congenial, Herrick!" she went on, warming almost to enthusiasm. "He's not hide-bound—he's one of the rebels like you—one of the 'elect,' I'm sure you think, don't you?"

That was what I *had* thought in the first few weeks of my acquaintance with him. That he was "one of the elect" was what most people, especially most women, did think of him, though they might not mean what I meant by "the elect."

As I hesitated to reply, she added wistfully, "I had been so lonely in my own way of thinking of things, that meeting and knowing Eugene was a wonderful experience to me!"

"I can well understand that, Nancy."

"Herrick," she asked anxiously, "shall you and I have to meet constantly next winter? Do you *have* to live in Leitersville?"

"No—but I'm going to. To see after you!"

"I shall never know an hour of peace!"

I considered her uncertainly, wondering whether I should tell her what I really thought about her situation and her husband's probable attitude towards the truth if he knew—

But I decided that my present business was to reassure her, not to further alarm her by even the barest suggestion that Eugene be told the truth.

"Listen, Nancy—it's not I, but you, that's in danger of betraying your secret. Get rid of your fear of me, or you'll give yourself away. You've no cause to fear any disaster through me. Your happiness is too dear to me! I only wish you were a little glad to see your old friend! As glad as I am to see you!"

"Oh, I would be, Herrick, if it were not for my awful dread! You see, Eugene married me under peculiar circumstances and—well, I can't go into it—but to have him discover that he had married a—Claxton!"

"When he thinks he married only a poor little village school teacher! Oh, Nancy, don't you—"

"How did you know?" she broke in, startled. "Did Eugene talk to you about me?"

"Weesy and Yi and your mother-in-law have all told me their family history from the fall of man up to date!"

"Oh, of course they did!" she smiled wanly. "And of course they lamented to you that Eugene had not 'done just so well,' didn't they?"

"They did. Look here! Why were *you* teaching school? You've surely not lost your money?"

"No. But I had to do something with my time, stranded as I was. And I thought teaching a village school would surely cover my identity."

"Then Eugene doesn't know," I marveled, "that he has married a very rich wife!"

"No," she answered, her troubled, sweet face betraying a new anxiety. "Don't you see, Herrick, I'd have to account for my money—and I couldn't do that without betraying who I am. So I use very little of it. Any way," she added, her eyes falling, the dark lashes making her white face paler, "there's another reason why I don't want him to know—yet—that I have any money. I did mean to tell him just as soon as I safely could; as soon as I could decide on some plausible explanation of it. But during these weeks at this farm house I've been seeing how much the Pennsylvania Dutch think of money and—and I'm afraid Eugene thinks a little too much of it for his good. So I'm determined, Herrick, that our marriage shall not mean money to my husband, but love and only that. I'll give him myself—but if I gave him money too, I'm afraid he'd think more of that—I sound disloyal, I suppose, but I *am* afraid he'd think more of that than of the gift of myself! Oh, I know this sounds as if I had not meant what I said about his having won me with his high ideals of life and his sympathy with my own feelings about things—but, Herrick, you and I who have always had money can't value it as those do who have had to struggle bitterly all their lives—as Eugene

has had to do," she apologized for her mate. "His poverty has always been such a humiliation to him!"

"He's not poor now, however. The salary of the Head Master at the Academy must seem, by his standards, a very good living indeed. Doesn't it?"

She hesitated, looking embarrassed, and I saw how she hated to admit what was instantly obvious to me, that her husband had not told her what his salary was to be—a fact so all-important to him!—which certainly concerned her, his life's partner, as much as it did him.

To relieve her confusion, I quickly continued, without waiting for her to reply, "On eight thousand dollars a year, with house, coal, automobile and a chauffeur thrown in, you can live in an inexpensive town like Leitersville very comfortably, can't you?"

"Quite," she nodded, failing in her obvious effort to hide her astonishment at the size of the salary. I wondered whether Eugene had deliberately deceived her about it, for she looked not only astonished but hurt. "Eugene need not worry about expenses at all," she added with a forced lightness. "I wonder why he does. Now, old Herrick!" she suddenly reproached me with the affectionate playfulness of years ago—assumed, I saw, to cover her feelings, for assuredly she did not feel playful, "I see you're the same sarcastic old curmudgeon you used to be! I can read in your face just what you're thinking—you think Eugene is just a little inconsistent!"

"A little'?" I grinned. "In one of his Leitersville lectures, Nancy, he eloquently reproached 'the modern world,' for holding gold to be of greater worth than a human being. 'A witless, soulless millionaire,' he declared, 'may receive the homage of society, may hold in subjection thousands of men of brains and heart. But

let him lose his wealth and he ceases to be worthy of consideration and himself falls into subjection. Any sin may be forgiven to wealth—dullness, dishonesty, greed, lust, cruelty, injustice. The one unforgivable crime is poverty. We can't forgive that even in our near relatives'—*that's* the way Eugene talked about wealth! Old Leiter was going to throw him out of the Academy for saying that! But he decided he could shut him up more effectually by making him Head Master."

"If old Leiter," she said indignantly (and her flashing eyes included me in her indignation) "thinks he can bribe Eugene to forswear his deepest convictions, then old Leiter doesn't know Eugene!"

("Better than you know him!" I thought, but did not say.)

"Don't you see, Herrick," she pleaded for her husband, "that it is those fine and thoughtful things that Eugene says which express his *real* self, and that the other things in him—lower things—are only on the surface and that he will slough them off in time?"

("How about the things a man says as over against the things he does?" I wanted to ask—but I refrained.)

"I remember his once saying in a lecture," she eagerly went on, "that it isn't 'the man who has learned to make big and easy money, but he who has found and mastered congenial work, that is blessed among men.' I'm sure, Herrick, that's Eugene's real feeling."

"And yet you instinctively know, my dear," I retorted rather impatiently, "that to protect your married love, you must conceal from him that you are rich!"

"I'll admit," she conceded, her eyes downcast, her voice unsteady, "that he hasn't yet found, altogether, his best self. And I'm very sure that riches wouldn't speed up that quest!"

I had been taking in, while she sat before me on the side of my bed, the ravages which tragedy had wrought upon her young face, but which, later, a growing sense of security—and love—had greatly overlaid with a soft radiance. She had always been sweet-tempered, but without the weakness of character that so often goes with that virtue. Crushing circumstances had temporarily submerged her real personality which, as I well knew, was anything but weak; had made her submissive, timid, almost humble. But she came from a forceful race and I felt sure that in the end her blood would tell. Eugene Curry would better mind his steps! Here were old-fashioned innocence, simplicity, integrity, with, I was sure, a very modern intelligence, yoked in marriage to—what? Well, although I tried to do full justice to Curry's finer side, my sense of something in him that was, at the core, unwholesome, untrustworthy, grew ever stronger, more definite. Would Nancy's clear eyes ever penetrate to that sick center of her husband's soul? It was evident that she still continued, after several months of marriage, to idealize him; that she was, as yet, only feeling her way to really knowing him. But in that moment before she had recognized me to-day, while she was crossing the room with my tray, I had noted in her delicate face a troubled wistfulness, a look of uncertainty. Eugene whom she had known only at his charming and marvelous best as a suitor and lover; known him through his chaste and polished conversational style, his fine manner, his (no doubt) highly literary letters, she was now seeing in his own home, in the most intimate personal relation, unmasked. And she had not known, did not yet know, that he had been masked. He scarcely knew it himself. He had made the mistake of giving her an idea of himself that few men, and certainly not

he, could live up to. No wonder she was looking uncertain, rather bewildered!

She seemed to me very girlish and appealing as she sat here before me, her hands clasped in mine. I thought of her distinguished father, known on two continents as a diplomat and a scholar; of how he had idolized his only child; of her beautiful, stately mother, "a lady of the old school"; of the home of her girlhood, an extensive old estate on the Hudson, the rendez-vous of artists and literary men of note who were wont to gather about her great father; of the atmosphere of culture, of social prestige, which she had breathed from babyhood; of the protected, cherished life she had led in this ideal, though perhaps over-luxurious, over-privileged environment—until that awful night of crime, exposure, hideous disgrace, world-wide publicity—

It was a wonder the girl had kept her reason, let alone her maidenly sweetness!

I noted that her life as a village teacher for three years and as a member of this household had not robbed her of that unique distinction in appearance, in bearing, in dress, that had seemed to set the race of Claxtons apart, in a vulgar age, almost as a survival.

And Eugene Curry (I recalled with wonder) had hesitatingly conceded to me that he "wouldn't call Nancy crude!" "A quaint little country girl," he had patronizingly pronounced her; "a sweet, innocent, unsophisticated child." When I had asked, "Is she quite unrepresentable?" he had answered, "Not in the sense of being vulgar—no, she's not really unrepresentable. But she'd never cut a figure in society. She's demure, retiring—"

And Dorothy Renzheimer, in his opinion, did cut an admirable figure in society—gay, dashing, exuberant.

It seemed incredible that a man of Curry's apparent fastidiousness could be so insensitive to personal quality. In fact he certainly was not so insensitive; no doubt it was just that unusual fineness in Nancy which had, in the first place, attracted him.

His response, however, to the coarse glamour of wealth, splendor, social power, had been the stronger. I could not doubt that he would have preferred, for purely worldly reasons, to have married Dorothy Renzheimer! Whether in the depths of his heart he felt more allied to Dorothy, I could not surmise.

Of course now that I knew his people, it was more understandable that he should actually think Dorothy a fine lady. But that he should feel a shade doubtful about Nancy because she was not vivid and striking, did seem to me strangely obtuse, and quite out of character for one who seemed capable of high thinking and delicate feeling.

When I thought of his expecting Nancy Claxton to do the family washing, I almost found it funny. I was relieved that her determination to hide her identity did not go to the length of living up to this expectation of his.

"Dear me, we're forgetting all about your dinner and it's stone cold!" she suddenly said remorsefully. "You can't eat it."

"No, just let me have a glass of milk, please, my dear—thank you."

"Weesy will think you didn't like her cooking," she said apprehensively, as she surveyed the boiled beef, potatoes, and cabbage piled on the tray.

"Tell her I have a headache. Nancy, you must not forget to call me Mr. Appleton before the family and I'll of course call you Mrs. Curry. I suppose you will

have to tell Eugene that Appleton, late of the Leitersville Academy, is here. How's he going to take that, Nancy?"

"Hard! He will hate it! He has spoken of you so admirably! He told me that you and a chemist named Bradley were the 'only gentlemen' on the Faculty."

I bit my lip to hide the grin that threatened at hearing this.

"I think it's rather a wonder, Nancy, that you didn't suspect who I was when Eugene talked of me."

"How could I ever have imagined your taking to school teaching? Why on earth did you?"

"An experiment. I'll tell you about it some time."

"During all these three years, Herrick, I've been following your rising career as a journalist and magazine writer and of course your steady advancement in that line was another thing that kept me from identifying you with the Leitersville teacher that Eugene kept talking about—though he actually did say once that Appleton of the history department ought to have a new degree—R.A.—Rising Author. Herrick!"

"Well?"

"Do you think it strange, Herrick, that I felt no scruple about marrying under a false identity?"

"You were justified—but foolish."

"There's always the possibility of discovery," she said miserably, "and discovery would ruin Eugene!"

"Nonsense, my dear! It wouldn't. You're a most unworldly child, or you'd know it wouldn't."

"I've made up my mind," she said, a wild light in her eyes, "that if Eugene ever discovers the truth, I'll kill myself! I couldn't live and bear it! So you can understand," she added sadly, "why I'm not overjoyed to see you, Herrick!"

"Throw off your fear of me!" I begged, "and let us get some joy out of this meeting! I need you as much as you need me—I'm awfully alone, Nancy! The Appleton family, my dear, does not enthusiastically admire my ideas or the things I do. I fancy *you* won't find me quite so bad as they do. Can't you let my presence here and in Leitersville bring back for both of us some of the *happiness* of the past instead of its suffering? For you know, my dear, it *was* a happy life for seventeen years!"

"Oh, wasn't it!" she breathed, melting under my appeal, slipping her hand from my clasp and smoothing the hair back from my forehead. "It *will* be wonderful to have your friendship again, Herrick! I do realize that! With one of my own race and kind once more!" she sighed with a long breath of homesickness. "Oh, but I've been lonesome!"

"But Eugene?" I inquired. "He hasn't dispelled the lonesomeness?"

"Oh, he has done so much more than that! After all I'd suffered, after the terrible shocks one after another, after my wanderings and gropings—to have found myself at last anchored, possessed, protected by a great love—"

It was almost intolerable to remember, as I heard her, that Curry would have jilted her if she had not fallen ill; that at the time of his marriage to her, he was practically betrothed to another girl; that he had passionately lamented his marriage as the great misfortune of his life!

Had she no suspicion of the truth?

"Nancy," I ventured, "Eugene told me of your wanting to be married when you thought you were dying. I supposed of course it was the sentimental notion of a lovesick girl—but now that I know it's *you* he's married,

that explanation of such a fantastic performance won't do. What is the explanation?"

"I wanted Eugene to have my money in case I died. You see, as I was told I had a fighting chance for recovering, I wasn't willing to risk betraying who I was by summoning a lawyer and making a will. So I made sure, by marrying Eugene, that he would get all I had except what the state would take. I managed to write a statement which I put into my jewelry case and addressed it to Eugene—he would have found it if I had died."

"Telling him who you were?"

"Yes, and leaving it to him to decide whether he'd accept the estate with all the horrible notoriety that that would plunge him into (and which he would shrink from far more than a less sensitive man would)—or whether, by making no claim, he would spare himself that hateful ordeal!"

"You didn't think *then* that the money would not be good for him?"

"I—I've discovered that since," she faltered.

"You are sole manager of your estate now, aren't you?"

"Yes. If I weren't, I could probably not hide away as I do."

"When a woman," I deliberately and cold-bloodedly informed her, "happens to be the wife of a tight Pennsylvania Dutchman, my dear, she has reason to be thankful that, under Providence, she is financially independent! You've got to devise some means by which you are free to use your comfortable income, even while avoiding any of the disasters you fear, such as betraying your past, hindering your husband's quest for his 'best self' (isn't that what you think he's chasing?) having him think more of your money than of you. How can it be done?"

"I don't know and I wish I did. For I would like to use a lot of my income! I'd like so much to pay back to Eugene's mother what she gave him for his college expenses. I'd like to have a car. I hate living here all summer and helping with the housework, when Eugene and I might be traveling or living in a home of our own. I'd like to keep two good maids when we go to Leitersville."

"The Head Master's house is so large as to make several maids a necessity, Nancy, and your social life in connection with the school, too, will demand it. Eugene's salary is of course large enough to justify it, if you can't use your own money."

"But I'm learning that a Pennsylvania German has an ingrained prejudice against paying for domestic work. And *I* have no greater antipathy than doing unnecessary household drudgery in a world full of more worth while things! How is it to be managed, Herrick?"

"It's got to be managed somehow! You'd be an awful dunce to make a household drudge of yourself just because Eugene expects you to—when your standards of life and his, your background and his, are poles apart!"

"Not in the essential things," she protested, looking troubled. "Only in a few material details which will naturally adjust themselves, Herrick."

"Yes, if you are firm and don't let yourself be bullied."

I expected her to resent that, but she flushed sensitively as she answered, "What can I do? Eugene even talks of our coming here again next summer to save expense and he's hoping that by that time I shall have learned enough about housework to be able to help Weesy more!" She laughed a little, but there was no mirth in her laugh.

"Look here!" I exclaimed indignantly, "you're start-

ing out all wrong, Nancy! Put your foot down now, right off, on all that sort of thing! You shouldn't ever have begun it!"

"I hate to be a disappointment in any way to my husband—and for him to find me (whom he thinks a dowerless bride) not only unable, but quite unwilling to do his housework, wouldn't be a disappointment, it would be a knock-down shock!"

"But, my dear, he has gone about in Leitersville gay society enough to know how people live. He knows how Dr. Lyman's family lived when he was Head Master."

"Of course he knows; and he will of course want to live nicely. He's much more fussy about appearances than I am. But he'll expect me, I do believe, to accomplish it without servants! That's the hitch in Eugene's character (we've all got a hitch somewhere, you know) he can't bear to see me not being busy all day at housework! A thing I never did in my life! It's the Pennsylvania Dutch idea of a woman, Herrick—one of the few Pennsylvania Dutch limitations that Eugene has not quite outgrown. He would rather—"

There was a knock on the door, followed by the turning of the handle—which, as the door was locked, of course did not yield. Nancy's eyes met mine in consternation.

"Nancy!" came Weesy's voice from the hall. "Make open! What fur did you have the door locked yet?"

Nancy glided swiftly and noiselessly to the door and with a dexterous movement silently turned the key at the same instant that she loudly turned the handle. "Why, it isn't locked, Weesy," she truthfully stated, as with innocent gaze, she faced an alarmed and suspicious Weesy on the threshold. "Do you want the tray? Mr. Ap-

pleton could not eat, he has such a—a queer feeling in his head!”

“Och,” cried Weesy, coming into the room, “if he got hit on the head in his accident, it’ll mebbly give something ugly yet! Does it make funny in your head?” she asked me solicitously. “But no, it don’t wonder me any if your head does make funny, readin’ all them books of Lypholate’s! It’s enough—ain’t, Nancy?—to make any person’s head go off, to use it so hard! Give it a rest, a little, can’t you?”

“Mrs. Curry was rubbing it a bit for me—I found it very soothing,” I said feebly.

“It wondered me what kep’ her here and her ironing waiting to be did,” said Weesy. “Come on, now, Nancy, and get through all oncet, or you’ll have a shamed face when Lypholate gets home from fishin’ and finds you ain’t through all.”

Nancy, avoiding my eye, followed her sister-in-law from the room.

CHAPTER XI

ALTHOUGH I could guess how chagrined Curry must feel upon learning that I was here in his home, I could not imagine how he would act about it.

"If he didn't have Nancy on his hands, I believe he would simply beat it without seeing me."

Nancy did not come to see me again during the whole afternoon, which made me in my weakness feel neglected and sore and childish.

"She might at least come in and read to me a while, or fuss round me a bit when I'm sick and lonesome and my ankle hurting!"

At four o'clock I heard her voice and Curry's in the adjoining room; he had probably just got home from his fishing trip. Intermingled with their voices, I could hear water poured into a basin (there was nothing so modern as a bath-room in the house, I had been informed) followed by the splash of washing. I found it difficult to realize Nancy Claxton in the homely and undignified intimacies of such a setting as this farm house. And if, as seemed to me probable, Curry, when here in his native environment, reverted to type and dropped that excessive fastidiousness which Leitersville so greatly admired, how could Nancy fail to become completely disillusioned?—even disgusted!

It was half past five when, to my pleased surprise, the pair of them, coming into my room together, bore between them a small table on which was spread a dainty supper for three; cold ham, thin bread and butter, new corn, a

salad, red raspberries, steaming coffee. The jolly coziness of it as they placed the table beside my bed and sat down, Curry cordially shaking hands with me and rallying me upon my plight, robbed the situation of any sting it could have had for him or any embarrassment for me. I felt grateful to Nancy for her tact in having arranged this little party (for of course she was responsible) and I hoped Curry also appreciated her cleverness.

He was fresh and spruce in a suit of *écru* palm beach cloth. Nancy had changed from her pink gingham frock of the morning to a low-necked, short-sleeved white dress the conspicuous simplicity of which I recognized as very characteristic of her. Her style of dress always had been individual and, in my opinion, artistic and distinctive. It must be that Curry ignorantly mistook this highly expensive simplicity and individualism in dress for village plainness, cheapness, lack of "style."

"You look like a Fra Angelico angel, Mrs. Curry!" I told her—at which her husband's eyes swept her in swift appraisal, for as he knew I was no flatterer and generally meant most of what I said, he valued my opinion; and undoubtedly my approval or admiration of his wife was a bit soothing to him at this awkward moment of my discovering him (after a year's acquaintance with his rather snobbish pretensions) in his crude native surroundings. I could fancy his thinking, "Well, here's at least one member of the family I needn't be ashamed of, even if she isn't the brilliant mate I might have married."

"Eugene doesn't usually care for my frocks," said Nancy. "He thinks they're much too plain. That is his reaction, I tell him, from his New Mennonite rearing."

Eugene instantly looked annoyed at her frank reference to his New Mennonite rearing and even I thought it a shade tactless, unless, indeed, she felt that in accept-

ing as a matter of course those circumstances which she was sure need not mortify a right feeling man, she was helping her husband in that "quest for his real self" which she was so sure he was pursuing. I suspected, however, that this frankness of hers in meeting the situation seemed to Eugene only crude lack of sophistication in not realizing how embarrassing it was.

Knowing all that I did of Nancy, her husband's attitude towards her, as I observed it during our supper that first evening I saw them together, was very trying to me. To be sure, it was evident that he was enamored of her; and not only sensuously; his imagination was stirred by her loveliness. Oh, yes, it was obvious enough that he was enjoying his bride who had been thrust upon him; that he found her, as most men must, desirable and delightful. Nevertheless, his manner towards her faintly suggested not only a sense of injury, a grievance, but a patronizing condescension that made me want to vulgarly smack his smug face. How any man could feel other than humble before the divine gift of such a rare woman as Nancy, I could not understand. Yet that air of homage to ladies which had been the real secret of his success in Leitersville society was entirely absent in his manner to his wife. He seemed to expect the homage to come from her side to him. He was not only not chivalrous towards her, he was inconsiderate and his tone was slightly careless.

On her part there was the radiant happiness of one who, after tragic shipwreck, loneliness, despair, finds herself anchored, possessed; a source of at least occasional delight to one she loved.

Yet across this glow of happiness was that shadow of wistful uncertainty, an anxiety to please, that from her to him gave me a sense of outrage.

"Lucky dog that I am!" said I, as Nancy helped me to the delicious looking salad she said she had herself prepared, "to have fallen among Good Samaritans and in a houseful of books!" I pointed to the large portion of Curry's library that bestrewed my bed. "It would have been ghastly to have had to lie here with nothing to read!"

"Aurelius, Emerson," said Curry, inspecting the books. "Too depressing for an invalid. I must bring you some jolly novels."

"Do, please," I agreed.

"The gospel of Aurelius and Emerson," he began in the earnest tone he had for his epigrams, "the passionless serenity which they preach, sometimes seems to me too much the dead level of the plane, that neither stirs the depths nor reaches to the heights of life."

Nancy looked at me beamingly, as who should say, "That's his thoughtful, real self speaking—isn't it admirable?"

"Emerson was, of course, limited by his unconquerable puritanism," I admitted, "though I do think he dug deep and soared high. This salad is bully, Mrs. Curry. I'm fiendishly hungry, having eaten no dinner."

"Why didn't you eat any dinner?" asked Curry.

"The shock of meeting your wife took away my appetite," I replied—and at Nancy's look of consternation, I added, "for I promptly fell in love with her at first sight."

"That's one thing, then, that you and I have in common," Eugene gallantly retorted—and Nancy's young face glowed with pleasure.

I turned upon her reproachfully. "Why didn't you come back and visit with me this afternoon? Here I

lay alone the whole long afternoon! I thought of course you'd be back."

At Curry's surprised face over this tone of intimacy towards one I had, presumably, just met, so unlike my usual rather morose stand-offishness, with which he was familiar, Nancy darted a look of frantic warning at me.

"A man that's been knocked up in an accident expects to have a fuss made over him," I complained. "What were you doing all the afternoon?"

"Ironing, Mr. Appleton."

"In this heat? All afternoon?"

She nodded.

"You see, Curry, how badly she behaves when you go out fishing all day. You'll have to stay at home to keep her in order."

"But you see, Appleton, I'm so old-fashioned as to believe in the domestic woman. It's a modern fad, you know, to discredit everything that the Past has taken for granted, good and bad alike; a child's duty to its parents, a mother's love, fidelity of husbands and wives, domesticity of women, reverence of all kinds— Perhaps some of those simple virtues (as they were once considered) the now repudiated 'sentimentality' of home, baby, mother, wife, took us as near to blessedness as we shall ever come in this life!"

"I've no theoretical objection to a domestic woman. God knows I think a woman's got a right to be domestic if she wants to be. But personally, I find them unexciting—domestic women. Are you a domestic woman, Mrs. Curry?"

"Not from choice."

"She wouldn't dare say she was after you've called them bores. What becomes of our homes without domestic women?"

"In losing our housekeepers, maybe we'll find mates, companions, friends. But perhaps you prefer a housekeeper? Martha or Mary?"

"Martha before dinner, Mary afterwards!"

"You'd like a harem, would you?"

"You see, Eugene," Nancy pointed out to him, "even in Jesus' time, the companionable, conversational Mary wasn't domestic."

With a little contemptuous shrug, he half turned his back to her and addressed himself exclusively to me, as one might snub a forward child. "When a woman isn't domestic, she's usually a failure as a mother—her natural function."

"I wonder," Nancy speculated, "which makes the better mothers, Eugene—washwomen or school teachers?"

"You wonder, do you?" he mockingly repeated. "You wonder a lot of foolish things my dear, don't you?"—and again he turned to me. "I'm not one of those who believe that modern Feminism need necessarily be incompatible with domesticity."

"Of course it need not. But we don't put a blooded race horse to the plow."

Nancy flushing up to her hair, hastened to answer me. "But Eugene and I don't happen to be of the blooded race horse breed. We are, as you see, plain country people."

Again Curry looked annoyed at her thrusting upon our attention the embarrassing fact (of which she was unaware of course) that he was not just what he had always posed to me as being.

"Is this," he asked me with a lift of his eyebrows, "your boasted brotherhood of man, Appleton,—this talk of some horses for the plow and others for the track?"

"I'm rather in sympathy with Lenin who declares he's

going to have a whole nation of gentlemen. But a gentleman may prefer, say, working in a field to teaching school, or a lady of birth like housework better than a lecture platform. Obviously people ought to do what they're fitted to do and like to do."

"But surely a dependent wife should serve her husband in return for her support?" he argued.

"How about that, Mrs. Curry?" I asked.

"I hold," she proclaimed oratorically, "that a wife should be free to choose how she shall earn her living—whether by keeping her husband's house or in some more congenial way."

"Hear, hear!" Eugene ironically exclaimed.

"For myself," persisted Nancy imperturbably, though she flushed under his slighting tone, "I'd prefer to earn mine by teaching than by ironing and cooking and sweeping."

"But that being quite impracticable," Curry answered her, "since an American gentleman is really supposed, you know, to support his wife, you will earn your living by keeping my house and *not* by teaching."

"I am sure," I said guilefully, "that judging from this supper, Mrs. Curry will manage the Head Master's house quite as beautifully as Mrs. Lyman always did it and with just as few servants. Surprising how well Mrs. Lyman did do it with only two maids, isn't it, Curry?"

"*We* shan't be able to afford two maids," he quickly affirmed. "Two maids for two people! I should say not!"

"But you'll have to do lots of entertaining, you know—parents bringing their children, school officials, lecturers from out of town—"

"We can always have in one of the Academy refectory waiters," he explained, "when we must."

"Mrs. Lyman seemed always to be an exceedingly busy woman even with her two maids for two people. She told me that if they returned another year she would absolutely have to keep a man besides."

"But Mrs. Lyman," Curry argued with feeling, "has an income of her own. I understand she brought her husband quite a bit of money."

I frowned in perplexity. "I don't seem to make the connection there?" I said questioningly. "I suspect that of being strictly Pennsylvania Dutch logic!"

Eugene again winced so perceptibly at this candid recognition of his Pennsylvania Dutch birth that I realized he was really feeling keenly the embarrassment of my presence in his home.

"The Pennsylvania Dutch," he retorted, "do have an honest sense of give and take."

"Glad to hear it! For then, my dear Mrs. Curry, on the days your lawful supporter is out fishing, you don't have to iron and cook and sweep. When he loaf, you loaf."

"But I *need* to loaf a bit," argued Curry. "You know what's before me in September—and how I've worked all winter."

"Wasn't Mrs. Curry teaching all winter?"

"But she won't be teaching in the fall."

"But she'll be doing what she doesn't like to do nearly so much, if you have your way!"

"It takes one's bachelor friends to tell one how to bring up a wife!"

"Apparently! I'm going to keep an eye on both of you next winter and see that you behave yourselves. I warn you, you're going to see a lot of me."

Eugene did not look overjoyed at the announcement. In the early months of our acquaintance at the Academy,

I had recognized the fact that he considered my friendship an asset. Not now, evidently; not, at any rate, in Leitersville; I was too unpopular with the trustees who employed him.

"You think," he said with an uneasy laugh, but in the smooth, gliding, velvety tone he never lost, "that I can't be trusted to take care of this little goose as she should be taken care of?"

"Not so long as you think more about her duty to you than of yours to her!"

"You always were engagingly frank, Appleton!"

"If you were free to choose, Mrs. Curry," I asked curiously, "what work *would* you elect to do?"

"I've really no objection to home-making—I've some talent for it, I think. But a house drudge can't be a home-maker."

"Delightfully feminine logic!" Curry shrugged.

I saw that he had simply fallen into a nasty habit of nagging at his wife and treating her opinions contemptuously. Scarcely could she speak without calling from him a mild snub or a smooth little sneer.

"But it's her own fault!" I inwardly fumed. "She shouldn't tolerate it! It's inexcusable weakness! And Nancy's *not* weak! She ought to pitch a dish at his head!"

Instead, however, of doing something useful and effective like that, she only tried to hide her hurt and mortification at his manner by a conciliatory tone that made me want to shake her.

"Feminine logic?" she gently repeated. "Well, as it was masculine logic that precipitated the late war and the Versailles Treaty and that sits in Congress and that runs our politics and that makes our laws and forces strikes

and establishes our prisons and courts and—really, really, you know, men have no room to say a word about any other brand of logic!”

“Perhaps not, except of that sort affected by unsophisticated little country girls!” he said, as he handed her his cup across the table to be refilled. She, finding the pot empty, rose to carry it and the cream pitcher to the kitchen for a fresh supply.

“Excuse me a minute,” she said; and I felt a distinct shock at seeing Eugene, the erstwhile gallant gentlemen of the Academy Faculty, not only not offer to go himself, but not even get up to open the door for her as she turned to leave the room.

“Do forgive me, Mrs. Curry,” I hastened to say as she stepped away from her chair, “for my inability to be polite!”

She evidently understood this implied criticism of her husband’s remissness, for she flushed uncomfortably as she quickly went away.

Of course a mere breach of conventional manners would have meant little to either Nancy or me; but to discover that a man such as Curry had for nearly a year appeared to me to be, held the Pennsylvania Dutch view of a wife as a chattel, to whom courtesies were not only not due, but would be misplaced, and that his public social graces were therefore a mere veneer, was, I confess, a bit startling. And if so to me, what must it mean to Nancy who had idealized him as a superman!

“That’s a rare, lovely girl you’ve had the luck to marry!” I said to him the moment she was gone, “and you’ll have to stand for my bluntness, not to say impertinence, in telling you that you must get over your Pennsylvania Dutch ideas of a woman, if you want to keep

her respect! Yes, you must! A woman like that can't go on idealizing a man whose own ideals of women are low!"

He looked more astonished than offended at my rather brutal candor. "Nancy's never told me, as you so flatteringly do, that she thought my ideals of women were 'low'!"

"You talked just now, you know, as though all a wife could mean to a husband was either domestic efficiency or money! Gosh! And your wife an exquisite creature like that!"

"I am glad you appreciate her so much," he said, much more gratified at my admiration than resentful of my criticism. "But it does seem to me, Appleton, that the very least a man may expect from a dowerless wife is 'domestic efficiency.' To be sure, there's the romantic or spiritual side," he admitted, "but there again, you'll hardly say the scales are against me!"

"Oh, come now, Curry, I know you like yourself fairly well, but you can't possibly be so pleased with yourself as to feel you're worthy of that gift of the gods, your wife!"

He looked at me oddly. "You actually are hit, I believe! She's a dear, of course. But when you come to balancing accounts between her and me, don't forget that I gave up marrying an heiress, a great lady, for a penniless village girl."

"Ass! Dorothy Renzheimer is a vulgar little upstart; your wife is a lady. Don't you *know* it?"

"You always were quixotic, Appleton. Dorothy Renzheimer has all her life had advantages such as poor little Nancy has never even dreamed of. In any situation Dorothy would be at home and at ease—whereas Nancy is unsophisticated, inexperienced," he said, his sense of injury

coming out in his tone. "I can't even feel confident that she'll be equal to the social demands made upon her in Leitersville."

I suppressed a grin. Dorothy, in Nancy's native world, would have been a monkey or a clown!

"It seems to me, Curry, that the question for you is whether *you* are equal to the spiritual demands made upon you by the love of a girl of rarest quality! Who and what were her parents? Do you know?"

"Her father was an Ohio country doctor."

"Well?" I said significantly.

"You mean that mine was a Pennsylvania Dutch farmer. But I have outgrown my family, Appleton, and Nancy has not."

"No, I don't think she has!"

"Oh I thought you considered her a paragon, a Fra Angelico angel! And of course she *is* too."

"Don't you see that she so plainly didn't have to outgrow her family?—that she is obviously well-born?"

"It's because you meet her for the first time as the prospective lady of the Head Master's house, as my wife," he replied with amazing complacency, "that she seems to you, perhaps, less simple and unsophisticated than she really is. I do hope Leitersville may see her with your partial eyes and not as the little village teacher I am taking into a new and untried life."

Nancy's return at this moment prevented my replying to this unspeakable smugness.

Again Curry failed to rise as she came into the room carrying the coffee and cream pitcher and it was I who had to reach from the bed and draw out her chair. Since of course he could not have behaved like this before his marriage (for Nancy must surely have *thought* she was marrying a gentleman) how did she feel in her heart at

the discovery of this post-nuptial manner?—this raw shedding of a masquerade cloak?

With the impression lingering in my mind of Curry's look of anxiety at my proposed intimacy in his home in Leitersville, I asked, "Shall you give up lecturing now that you are Head Master of the Academy?"

"But as Head Master I expect to be more in demand than ever for lectures," he answered, surprised. "It will yield me a very nice addition to my salary."

"But you'll have to change your tone and style considerably, not to offend your bosses, won't you?"

"Oh, of course, yes. The trustees are proposing to hold me down, I know. Naturally! What I fear is that the caution I shall find necessary will—well, as it were, clip the wings of oratory!" he smiled.

"Caution of that sort would, I should think, clip wings of any sort!"

"Yes, it's a nuisance! They nearly threw me out last winter, as they did you, for the things I said!"

"And *my* objectionable remarks were made only to the boys, not to public throngs. Yes, indeed, you'll have to forswear choice epigrams now," I lured him on, my off eye on Nancy's face to note the effect, the while I was inwardly wondering at myself for being deliberately sly and cruel. "Fancy your saying next winter, as I heard you last, to a huge crowd, among whom were scattered all our prosperous and conservative trustees, 'World capitalism has become a monster, a modern Frankenstein, that has gotten out of hand and beyond control'! Ha!" I laughed rather viciously.

"I *was* young and rash last winter, wasn't I!" he said with a little shudder.

"It won the Head Mastership for you! They elected you to shut you up, you know!"

"But," spoke in Nancy warmly, "he won't *be* shut up! A man like Eugene doesn't work merely for hire! He works to give his best service; to pass on to his pupils, regardless of consequence, the best that life has revealed to him. That's a true teacher's ideal!" said young, enthusiastic Nancy.

"You know all about it, don't you, my dear!" he gently sneered. "It was," he addressed me, his back half turned to her, "the dire effect upon the public of your being thrown out that made them afraid to throw me out too. They're a shrewd lot!"

"So you really owe your job to me. And it's I," I grinned, "that have made a hide-bound conservative of you!"

"He isn't that—he couldn't be false to himself for the sake of his position!" protested Nancy.

"One year under the rod of that bunch of trustees, Mrs. Curry, whose conservatism has become, as conservatism is apt to become, a stagnant, noxious pool, and your husband's oratorical flights will have ceased, he will no longer soar, he will only hover an inch above the base earth! What's the use of that, Curry?" I asked as he began to scribble into his ever-present note book. "You can't use *my* bright remarks any more!"

"Conservatism becoming a stagnant, noxious pool," he repeated, "is very good. Where did you get it?"

"Evidently where you don't get *your* brilliancy—out of my own dome!"

"It's going to be a great bore," he said, a slight impatience in his always suave tone, "to have a lot of clowns like those trustees, a newspaper-educated Chamber of Commerce group, dictating to me what I shall think and teach and lecture about!"

"But with your views, Eugene," persisted Nancy, look-

ing bewildered, "I don't see how you can work under such men!"

"I have to earn my living, don't I?—not being financially and matrimonially free as Appleton is; as free as a man of my—well, gift, if you'll allow me—for public speaking *ought* to be!"—and here I noted the faintest hint of an implied reproach; "as I might have been if you," patting her hand, "hadn't bowled me over and caught me!"

She drew her hand out of his reach. "Plenty of poor men," she said, "are true to their convictions, and a man like you *couldn't* be false to them!"

"A man like me can be tactful and avoid giving offense. He's got to be when he has a wife to support."

"He's got to be, you mean of course, dear, only in so far as it doesn't involve being insincere."

"I mean what I said, and I said 'avoid giving offense,' I believe. There's a woman's logic for you! You think I ought to employ a servant for you, or even two, and yet you'd have me defy those who make it possible for me to even clothe and feed you! I'd suggest, my dear, that you let me manage my own work in my own way without feminine advice."

He rose. "It's getting late; we must leave you to your rest, Appleton. Have you everything you need?"

"Yes, thank you. Including a perfect view from my window of the sunset over the river and hills. Look!" I pointed to my flaming red window.

This giving Curry one of those chances he never could resist, he strolled over to the window and gazing out upon the crimson twilight, spoke to us over his shoulder in the velvety tones of his public speeches—"The heart of the universe *must* be beautiful and divinely good, when

out of it comes such loveliness—the sunset, the moonlight, the stars, the lily, the rose!”

Again Nancy’s shining eyes sought mine to invite my admiration of such superior sentiments, and I was divided between my longing to kiss her sweet, innocent face and my impulse to shout imprecations at her for her credulity and lack of spirit.

CHAPTER XII

DURING my week of confinement it surprised me to find, from day to day, how very little Nancy and Eugene managed to see of me. In spite of Nancy's tactful breaking of the ice by that cozy supper at my bedside, Curry evidently suffered in having me here, for he paid me only the briefest daily visits, during which his manner was aloof and ill at ease. As for Nancy, it seemed to be not lack of inclination, but of time, that kept her from me. She seldom came near me except when she, instead of Weesy or Mrs. Curry, carried in my meals; and even then, lingering too long brought upon her a mild complaining and criticism from the family and, as I learned, from her husband himself. Evidently she helped all day long with the work of the farm house, endeavoring heroically "to do the right thing" in the difficult situation in which she found herself; trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. I hoped she would soon come to see what wasted effort it was.

"She is so qualified for another kind of service in life," I fretted. "It's like a Tolstoi wasting himself making shoes when he could have been writing *Anna Karéninas!*"

If the comparison was absurd, I did not at all feel it so at the time, so incongruous did it seem to me for Nancy Claxton to be doing actual drudgery in a farm house.

I gathered from stray comments by various members of the family that Nancy's only reward for all this futile and painful self-sacrifice was their contempt for her "doppling" ways and her ignorance of what every woman should know.

I had to put a strong restraint upon my inclination to advise and admonish her as to her proper "line" with these people. In spite of the age-long intimate friendship between the Claxtons and Appletons, her affairs were, strictly speaking, none of my business. And after all, a man and wife must struggle through their own difficulties; no one else can ever enter fully into them.

"So long as her infatuation for Curry lasts she'll continue to be supine, I suppose. It's of course love and not cowardice that makes her submit. And perhaps she's held down, too, by the fact of her having asked him to marry her prematurely, before he was quite ready. Is she troubled, too," I wondered, "by the fact that he married her under the belief that she was dying?"

"But once she's disillusioned about him," I concluded, "she'll be quite able to defend herself without my help or advice!"

The question was would she ever *be* disillusioned? According to some modern novelists, men invariably recovered from loving their wives; but women? My extensive novel reading had, I found, left me unenlightened here. Some novelists, to be sure, painted what they seemed to regard as quite admirable women whose love, under all circumstances and any kind of treatment, remained steadfast and self-sacrificing. I saw nothing admirable in such stupidity. I sincerely hoped Nancy would not prove to be like that. That even an infatuation could reduce one who was naturally so self-contained and of such poise as I knew her to be, to the pass of allowing herself to be dominated and slighted, greatly puzzled me.

"It must be the crushing effect of the awful suffering she's lived through!" I thought sadly.

I wondered whether her not repeating, in spite of my hints, that pleasant supper for the three of us and her

refraining to come with Eugene when he paid his brief daily calls upon me, were due to a reluctance to have me witness her husband's snubbing attitude towards her.

"I don't believe she lets herself realize just how badly he does behave to her. Or does she fancy that she really covers it from view by her cheerful endurance of it?"

The day the doctor announced that I might get on my feet and take my meals with the family, Curry ignominiously fled.

"Obliged to go to Leitersville on business," Nancy explained his absence at the first meal, a midday dinner, which I had at the family board in the kitchen. "He will probably stay until the end of the week."

By which time I would no doubt be gone.

The big, spotlessly clean kitchen was cozy and homelike, for a Pennsylvania Dutch kitchen is also the family living room. There was a rag carpet on the floor; a big old yellow settee with a patch-work cover on it against the wall; the dining table along the opposite wall; several rocking chairs and a sink containing a small pump completed the room's furnishings. The cook-stove and baking table had been moved for the summer to the "out kitchen."

I was directed to take my place on the bench that ran along the wall behind the table. It was the first time in my life that I had ever sat on a bench to dine except at Sunday school picnics when I was a boy; I slid into my seat beside Nancy and at her glance of anxiety lest I manifest surprise, my sudden childish inclination to laugh almost overcame me. I was thankful Eugene was not by.

The table was loaded with food; fried sausage, several vegetables, several kinds of pies, cakes and canned fruits, and a huge pile of bread; then all sorts of "side dishes"—pickles, jellies, sour red beets, pepper slaw.

"Don't you like sour to sossage?" asked Weesy, pushing the pepper slaw and pickled red beets towards me. "Me I always like sour to my meals even up to pie yet."

"Weesy she's so much fur sour that way," Mrs. Curry confirmed her daughter-in-law's statement. "But Lypholate not. He's more fur sweet. Och, now, it does beat all how much fur sweet ah-ver Lypholate is!"

"But Yi he's fur sour like me," said Weesy. "He's so much fur spec and sour with; ain't, Yi?"

"Yes, anyhow," said Yi, his mouth full of potato.

"We're all so much fur sour except Lypholate not," said Mrs. Curry. "Yes, me I canned forty jars of sour last year—pickles and beets and pepper slaw and chow chow and whatever."

Nancy at my side, looking pale and discouraged, ate very little.

"Appetite off?" I asked her solicitously.

"Too tired to eat," she answered listlessly.

"Little fool, little fool!" I openly scolded her, to the family's dull surprise. "Why don't you join your husband at Leitersville or run off to the seaside while he's away or—"

Her warning, frightened glance stopped me.

"Us we ain't no sich millionaires!" growled Yi. "It'll be time enough fur ah-ver Lypholate to leave his wife go pleasure-seekin' to the sea shore or wherever after he's paid back Mom fur his grand education!"

"Me I never get away all summer; us we're got so much work all the time!" pouted Weesy. "I ain't even been on church all summer."

"And you haven't once put on the dress I made for you," Nancy told her. "And it's so becoming to you. Take her to church next Sunday, Yi, so she can wear her new dress. Oh, no, I forgot you don't call it 'church'—"

and I suppose you would not want her to wear such a gay frock to the Mennonite meeting."

"No, fur the reason that I become it so!" said Weesy crossly. "You must look as onbecoming as you otherwise kin on Mennonite meeting! And my new frock the dark color makes me so pretty complected! I couldn't wear *it* to meeting—och, no!"

"As soon as my car arrives," I said, "I'll drive you and Mrs. Eugene into Virginsville some evening to see a picture show and that will give you a chance to wear your becoming frock."

Yi regarded me somberly. "With you takin' Weesy to a movin' pitcher show and Nancy makin' her sich fancy frocks, much chanct the Holy Spirit's got to do His work in her heart! Why can't yous leave her be till the Holy Spirit's got her converted oncet!"

"I don't want to get converted, Yi!" Weesy objected resentfully. "I want to have my fun a little first. It ain't fur *my* soul, but fur your own that you're so concerned anyhow!"

"It ain't neither—what's over you?" he protested.

"Yes, it is, too! You have afraid Gawd's got it in fur you fur tryin' to git around Him by marryin' me before you turned plain!"

"Yes, and you'd see your own husband go to everlastin' punishment before you'd give yourself up!" Yi reproached her with a sudden gleam in his dull eyes that gave me a start; made me feel distinctly uneasy. To what lengths might not his fanaticism and fear lead him?

"You'd sacker-fice your husband and your Gawd," he continued, "just because you're so much fur pleasure-seekin'!"

"Much chanct *I* ever get fur pleasure-seekin'!" retorted Weesy. "You bet I'll go with you along, Mister," she

declared to me, "to the movin' pitcher show! Me and Yi used to go often sometimes," she added, "before he give hisself up and turned plain. Do you mind, Yi, that piece we seen where the willainness she separated the leading lady from the leading man on their bridal night and they never met again till act three? I couldn't har'ly keep from cryin', the leading lady and the leading man they had sich tough luck!"

"Yes, that there piece," said Yi, shaking his head, "was most *too* sad! I didn't like it. It got me down-hearted. And that ain't what I went to a pitcher show fur—to git down-hearted!"

"Well, I guess anyhow not!" agreed his mother. "To spend good money fur to git yourself made down-hearted! That would be funny too again!"

"I'd sooner see Charlie Chaplin than sich a sad piece; Charlie Chaplin he kin always git me laughin'," said Weesy. "Yi he used to laugh so loud at Charlie Chaplin, it gimme a shamed face fur him! I used to laugh more at Mutt and Jeff than at Charlie Chaplin, though to be sure, Charlie Chaplin has got me goin' a'ready too. But Mutt and Jeff! Och, my souls! Them fellahs certainly had me tickled a'ready!"

I suddenly realized as I listened to Weesy that she was a voter!

"Might as well enfranchise cows!" I thought.

When one considered the smugness with which "loyal citizens" talked about "Americanizing" the foreigner! The Pennsylvania Dutch came here too long ago not to be considered Americans as much as any of us.

"Do you vote, Mrs. Yi?" I inquired.

"Och, no, I don't bother. Because you see, Yi he darsent wote. New Mennonites don't wote. So I just let it. I did wote a'ready—oncet or twicet or so—when

Yi did, before he joined meetin'. I just woted same as him so's there wouldn't be no argyment or disturbance. But now I don't bother with it no more."

"But you ought to use your new rights as a citizen, Weesy," urged Nancy.

"My rights! I don't look fur my rights in this here world!" pouted Weesy.

"The vote will give them to you sooner than Heaven will."

"Och, you better keep away from that there poll, Weesy!" her mother-in-law warned her. "Too many wild women go to that there poll that better not go!"

"But more tame ones," Nancy assured her.

"Well, to be sure, I know *some* nice ladies that go to that there poll—yes, that I do. But they ain't a-plenty, I guess!"

"You sayed, Nancy," spoke in Yi, "that Lypholate will be home till the end of the week—"

"No, that he may be *away* until the end of the week."

"Till the end of the week he'll get home, you sayed," insisted Yi, confused over their different uses of the word "until," the Pennsylvania Dutch using it in place of "by." "Well, but he darsent keep ah-ver Ford away so long! Us we need it fur market till Sa'rdays a'ready."

"He knows that and he'll surely be home by Friday night," Nancy, also confused, assured him.

"He hadn't ought to have took it!" grumbled Yi. "He sayed the gasoline would come cheaper than the railroad ticket, but he don't count the wear on my car! And that there second-hand Ford car I had her four years a'ready and she wasn't just so new when I got her and her age is beginnin' to tell on her a little."

"She makes so funny still, ah-ver Ford!" complained Mrs. Curry.

"Yes, mind if she don't!" cried Weesy. "Fords is all right when they go. But when they don't go—och, my souls!"

"You said it!" nidded Yi. "When they don't go!"

"It's hell!" breathed Nancy reminiscently—but at the horrified consternation of the family she amended her remark—"it's healthy! Bad for the heart and lungs to go so fast!"

"Now, now!" Yi sternly admonished her. "You swore! You know you did! Ah-ver Lypholate's wife *swearin'* yet!"

"A body'd think," said Mrs. Curry reproachfully, "that bein' sich a dopple as you are at the housework, Nancy—so's you got to hire your washin' yet—you'd try in all other ways to make it up to ah-ver poor Lypholate!"

Nancy looked at me and smiled, offering no reply to her mother-in-law. I seemed to be more embarrassed than she was by the primitive unreserve of the family as to their personal affairs.

"Seein' how grand educated ah-ver Lypholate is," Yi supplemented his mother's criticism, and how he had a right to look high in pickin' a wife, the least you kin do, Nancy, is to mind your maurals and not *swear* anyhow! My goodness!"

"It wonders me, Nancy," put in Weesy, "that you didn't even bring Lypholate no aus tire!"

"I never heard of one before I came here," said Nancy, amazingly unperturbed. Perhaps if she had, for a fact, been penniless, she could not have stood this running commentary so complacently.

"What in God's name is an 'aus tire'?" I asked, regretting, as I saw them stare, my unnecessary profanity.

"A household outfit," Nancy explained. "Kitchen

things, a stove, tins, kettles; besides, bedding and linens. A Pennsylvania Dutch bride that doesn't have a good austere is disgraced."

"Yes, it gives her an awful shamed face!" added Weesy. "But ah-ver Nancy it don't make *her* nothin', it seems!"

"If you'd ever so forgit yourself, Nancy, as to swear like you done a bit ago, when you git to Leitersville among Lypholate's grand friends—och, tut, tut!" lamented Mrs. Curry.

"You best watch yourself," added Yi, "and not make ah-ver Lypholate have ashamed yet fur his wife!"

I was glad to see that though Nancy's bearing towards this family was considerate—as theirs to her was not—they were quite powerless to hurt or offend her. She remained as unaffected by their criticisms as though they had been foolish children.

It seemed to me that they unconsciously, not deliberately, had adopted Eugene's slighting attitude towards her. They were not intentionally unkind. They actually did feel a contempt for a dowerless wife who had not even the compensating asset of being a husky, capable household worker. Had Eugene married a vulgar snob who had put on airs to them, they would undoubtedly have respected her profoundly. But for the sort of breeding that quite simply and naturally assumed their level, claiming no least superiority to them, they had neither understanding nor appreciation. It was wholly lost upon them. Was it equally lost upon Eugene? I feared it was.

CHAPTER XIII

IT was a few days after Eugene's abject flight that a letter came to the farm house announcing an impending visit from his sister, Lottie, accompanied by "Professor" Klam, her husband, and Florence, their five year old child.

In spite of the fact that my knee being now almost well, and my repaired car having arrived from Columbia, I had no least excuse for remaining here any longer, I determined, nevertheless, to stay on to meet Mrs. Lottie whom the family here and even Nancy seemed too consider very formidable; I might perhaps break the force of her heavy impact upon my little friend by injecting myself between them. The image I had been led to form of the lady made me feel that Nancy needed to be protected from her.

"Any objections to my staying on at the farm for a while, Nancy?" I asked her as we drove together on the Lincoln Highway the first afternoon I had my car back again. I had simply picked her up bodily under the appalled eyes of Weesy and Mrs. Curry, flung her over my shoulder like a bag of potatoes, carried her out of the kitchen where for five hours she had been paring peaches for canning, deposited her hatless and wearing her pink gingham frock, in the car and driven away with her before she or any one else had been able to catch their breath to protest.

"They'll never recover from the shock of this!" she had gasped, gurgling with laughter as we sped away. "They'll recount it from now on until they're gray and

feeble! A married woman going out riding with any other man than her husband! Your picking me up and carrying me! Man-handling me! Oh!" she sighed blissfully, "how they'll revel in the lurid immorality of it!"

Her eyes were bright with joy at her deliverance from the kitchen, at the soft, warm air, the delicious summer odors, the gay sunlight, the swift, smooth gliding through space.

"Well, they can't blame *you*," I pointed out. "I overpowered you."

"With sheer brute force!" she exulted. "They'll decide that you've all along been a reckless brigand in disguise! They'll be worried for my virtue and Eugene's honor!"

"I'm only sorry," I said, "that Mrs. Lottie Klam wasn't by to see it!"

"So am I!"

"Good! You're improving! I was beginning to fear you'd lost that lively sense of humor I seem to remember you used to have. You *were* a sprightly child, you know!"

"Well, if the Klams didn't provoke my sense of humor nothing under heaven could!"

It was here that I asked her whether I might stay on.

"Do you mean have *I* any objections?"

"Yes. Have you?"

"It's marvelously comforting, Herrick, my dear, to have you 'round!—to feel your friendliness brooding over me! I'm so deliciously conscious of it every minute! But—but I'm so constantly afraid that we'll forget ourselves!"

"You want me to stay," I pronounced conclusively. "And I'm sure Yi and Weesy would like me to remain for the board I pay?"

"Yes, they're making two hundred percent. profit!"

"Eugene, then, is the only one who doesn't want me here?"

"It would be almost more than he could bear to sit with you at his mother's table!"

"And you want to spare him that?"

"No. For his own soul's sake, Herrick, I want him to have to stand up to it. When one has known *real* shame—as I have," she faltered, "the sort Eugene feels does seem so unnecessary!"

In my heart I wondered whether Eugene would think Nancy's shame, if he knew of it, a greater embarrassment, a worse cross, than he considered his own family.

"I'd like to stay on, Nancy, to see you through this visit of Mrs. Klam. She must be a grenadier!"

"She's an army of grenadiers! They all stand round for her almost as much as they do for Eugene. Even he admires and respects her amazingly. Somehow, I can't manage to be impressed. I've tried to be. Eugene expects me to be. But she just seems to me hopelessly stupid and absurd. Of course I don't tell Eugene that! But, Herrick, I'm sure that never before was so much self-admiration encompassed within one human bosom—and an ample bosom at that! You know Lottie really thinks she *matters* to God Almighty; that He's personally concerned with every detail of her morals and manners and highly satisfied with the result of his handiwork! No one ever before knew so well as she does just how to keep a house clean and sanitary, how to rear a child, how to cook and cater, how to dress, how to keep a husband's fidelity; to hear her monologues of self-praise—oh, Lord!"

"This is hopeful! I was afraid you might lie down at her feet and let her jump on you! You seem to have

developed such a pernicious habit of letting people bully you! Is Mrs. Klam's self-admiration as baseless as that consoling illusion usually is?"

"Well, no, it isn't. I'm afraid I'd be proud, too, if I were so practically efficient as she is. She does all her own housework except her washing and she does it so well and then guards the beautiful result so carefully that her husband has to smoke out of doors and her child may never, except under impossible rules, bring a playmate into the house, and both her husband and child have to remove muddy shoes before stepping on her scrubbed kitchen porch (there are slippers in a locked box at the foot of the steps). She has a whole set of rules like that which they have to live by. One gets the impression that she was created by God to serve her house instead of her house having been built to serve her. Her favorite topic of conversation is her efficient housekeeping—when she isn't telling you what an efficient mother, club woman, American, neighbor and church member she is; and if you'll respectfully let her tell *you* how to do and be all that *she* is, she loves you. But when one looks restive and bored and unappreciative, then one becomes anathema to her."

"But I should think her husband would take to drink and her child become imbecile."

"Her husband, would you believe it, is as pleased with himself as she is with herself! A strutting little turkey-cock! And they both pride themselves on their wise judgment in having selected a perfect mate."

"Nancy! You're making this up!"

"You'll see for yourself. Next to himself, Elmer admires Lottie, and next to herself, she admires Elmer."

"A very happy arrangement, I must say!"

"When they're not telling you of their own good points, they're recounting each other's. He approves of everything she most genteelly does and thinks and says. And she admires him as much, if not more, than she does Eugene. Just imagine!" laughed Nancy, as though the very acme of absurdity was to admire any one as much as you admired Eugene. "And oh, Herrick!" she went on, with a long, deep sigh, "the immaculate purity of their moral sentiments! With never a suspicion of their own ignorance and stupidity!"

"But I should think, you know, that Mrs. Klam's neighbors and acquaintances would ridicule some of that egotism out of her."

"In a little town like Columbia? On the contrary, they admire, revere, quote and copy her. How Mrs. Klam efficiently cleans out corners with a hairpin or sanitarily disposes of garbage or competently washes her own automobile or averts moths. And of course their village admiration has exaggerated her consciousness of her own tiresome virtues until now, to sane people (like me!) her effect is so soporific that when she begins to monologue, I promptly doze. She doesn't like me."

"It sounds to me suspiciously as though the dislike were a little mutual."

"No, really, Herrick, I couldn't rise to anything so like interest in Lottie as to dislike her. She simply wearies me and makes me want to get away from her."

"I gather from the talk of the family here that she has the Pennsylvania Dutch proverbial frugality in rather an exaggerated form?"

"Yes, she and Elmer are both very 'near,' as the 'Dutch' call it, though Lottie calls it being a good manager. Next to her own and her husband's personal superiority,

the thing she respects and loves is money. It puzzles me so—it's like an insanity—the way they feel a deep respect for a person just because he's rich!"

"Yet you are not tempted to declare your own riches?"

"'Tempted'? To subject myself to their completely changed attitude towards me! If ever they do find out I've money, I shall flee!"

"Then *I'm* tempted to tell them! For I think you *ought* to flee! Your being here is incongruous!"

"Let me work it out myself, Herrick, and don't you interfere!" she pleaded. "Promise!"

"I won't interfere unless I see you going too far in self-effacement! There's a limit to my endurance, if there isn't to yours! But don't be uneasy, my dear," I laid a reassuring hand on hers as I met the alarm in her eyes. "Of course I know it's your problem—to be worked out in your way, not mine. On the whole, then, you find the admirable Lottie far less endurable than Weesy and Yi and Mrs. Curry?—whom you seem to take placidly enough!"

"Nobody could take Lottie 'placidly'—she bears down on you so! Oh, of course she has her good points; she appreciates Eugene; she does love her little girl, though she tyrannizes over her to the child's ruin; she has some taste in dress—that is, she's conventionally stylish. Prides herself on her strict conformity to all accepted standards."

"A standard only has to be accepted to make it right and sacred to most people! It's no wonder, is it, that Bernard Shaw thinks this planet must be a lunatic asylum for the other planets! Is Lottie's husband as standardized as she is?"

"He's freakish rather than standardized. She's large and stately; he is little and fussy. She contents herself

with privately comparing herself to her neighbors, to their disparagement, while Elmer actively goes after them, advises and reproves them, and they think him a busy-body and a nuisance."

"And he's a musician?"—I was puzzled.

"He fondly imagines he is. His music is almost the worst thing about him—though perhaps that's going too far! But wait until you hear him sing!"

"God protect me!"

"God'll need to! There's a cabinet organ in the farm parlor, you know," she warned me. "And I ought to prepare you, too, for another peculiarity of Elmer's—his mispronouncing nearly every word of more than two syllables. How it does make Eugene wince!"

"What's the attitude of the Klams towards the family at the farm?"

"Lottie ignores Weesy, tolerates Yi, patronizes her mother, snubs me. Elmer advises and scolds us all and tells us how exemplary and respectable he and Lottie are and she joins in the chorus."

"And Lottie resents your callousness towards her perfections?"

"She considers my failure to be impressed as not only inexcusable stupidity, but as insult added to the injury I inflicted upon her and Eugene by marrying him when he *could* have married (so she has intimated to me!) a girl named Dorothy Renzheimer who lives in Leitersville. Did you know her, Herrick?"

Her tone was casual, but a betraying red crept into her face as she spoke.

"No one in Leitersville could escape knowing Dorothy Renzheimer, my dear, she's such a bouncing, conspicuous sort of person, besides being old Leiter's granddaughter, and *he's* the financial and political boss of the town, who

dictates to the Academy Faculty what opinions they're to hold on the origin of species, the immortality of the soul, the Treaty of Versailles, West Virginia mines, the I. W. W.'s, Soviet Russia, Scott Nearing, Turkey and Socialism."

"No wonder *you* couldn't remain on the Faculty! How Eugene can, puzzles me! But about this Dorothy Renzheimer—did Eugene—did she—like him?"

"All the marriageable girls liked him. And some of the married ones. He has a fatal attraction for your sex, Nancy, and you may as well adjust your mind to that at the start. It's not his fault, of course."

"Is Miss Renzheimer—is she attractive, Herrick?"

"Not to people of taste. She's rather vulgar and tiresome. The only likable thing about her is her quite primitive frankness."

"Then her only possible asset in Eugene's—in Lottie's—eyes was her money?"

"And her position in Leitersville."

"Oh, that!" smiled Nancy—and I read in that smile how entirely ignorant she was of the great value her husband attached to this thing which from her standpoint was so negligible. To her the difference between Dorothy Renzheimer, Weesy, Lottie, would be only one of degree, not of kind. The people of her own native sphere had been of another race. "But if she is like that, Herrick—this Miss Renzheimer—how could even Lottie think that Eugene might, if he had not been engaged to me, have married her?"

"Of course he could not have, without having first become another man from the one everybody takes him for," I assured her guilefully.

The slightly troubled look in her eyes cleared up. "Of course I know he couldn't, with his fine ideals, have mar-

ried for money, without love or even respect! I was typing one of his lectures for him last week, in which he says, 'Aristocracy of the soul is the only true gentility. We are all born to the purple spiritually. All, all are sons of God.' That," she insisted, "is Eugene's real feeling. Isn't it fine? He does say such fine things, doesn't he?"

"He does."

"And he simply does not realize," she added gravely, "how bad money would be for him. He thinks it would elevate him above all sordidness—'release his soul,' he says. If I believed it would, I'd manage in some way to give him mine. But I can't think that it would."

"Nancy!" I abruptly asked her, "do you believe that I have your best welfare at heart?"

"Of course I do, Herrick," she answered with a grateful squeeze of my arm.

"And that I'm some years older and more experienced and more worldly-wise than you?"

"Yes? Well?"

"Then promise me solemnly that you will never give up the control of your money to Eugene."

She was thoughtfully silent for a moment. "You mean," she asked, "for his sake or for mine?"

"For yours!" I exploded. "Except as 'his quest for his true self' affects *you*, my dear, I don't care a damn about his true self! What I do care about is that you shall keep in our own hands your means of self-protection."

"Self-protection? Against what, Herrick?" she asked in a subdued tone.

"Against slavery to another person's ideas of life that are not your ideas and never can be! Against stultifying and unnecessary household drudgery—and unneces-

sary deprivation of comforts. Your own income is your only protection against all this!"

"Oh! You misjudge Eugene!" she said with a little catch of her breath. "I need no better protection than his love!"

"Promise me!"

"I admit that Eugene has some things to learn—and so have I. We're teaching each other. Marriage means so *much* adjusting and compromising that sometimes I wonder that any marriage at all can stand!"

"Your promise, Nancy, that you will never yield up your control of your money."

"That's such a sordid idea for *you* to have, Herrick!"

"We're dealing with a sordid clan—a sordid condition. Your promise—come!"

"Well—I promise. But I insist it's not for my self-protection but for Eugene's own sake that I'm afraid to give him my money—or to let him know I have money."

"Have it so, my dear. But remember *I have your promise.*"

We drove for a while in a thoughtful silence. But very soon we began to chat again, for we were discovering, Nancy and I, in these days of Eugene's absence, how very much we had to say to each other; how much we had in common—our background, our memories, our tastes, our instincts, our ideas. We talked just now of our childhood, of her mother (but that was precarious ground) of the authors to whom we had become addicted, the poets and prophets that had had an influence in shaping us; and I was thrilled to find that she was still, as of old, the only completely companionable girl I had ever known.

Her family and mine had lived for generations as neighbors and closest friends and the comradeship which

through this propinquity had grown up between her and me and had been the chief joy of our youth, had, we were now learning, lost nothing during our three years' separation, but rather had gained new points of contact and become enriched and deepened through our wider experiences of life.

That afternoon we seemed to come very close. It was an hour never to be forgotten by either of us.

It fascinated me to watch the change that came over Nancy under the spell of our unrestrained communion—to see her weariness disappear, the anxious, wistful look in her eyes give way to placid contentment, her whole being grow softly radiant—the effect on my steering was noticeable!

It was not until the hour drew near for the early farmhouse supper and I had turned the car to go back, that she began to wilt again.

"Oh, dear, it will be so tiresome to hear them go on about this!"

"Would Eugene share their disapproval of this immoral tête-à-tête?"

"I don't know. He—he'd think I ought not to have deserted his mother and Weesy at the peach paring."

"Because he doesn't want you to destroy the chance of a welcome here in your future summers! If you're wise, you'll make them forbid you to darken their doors! I'll help you—we'll flirt under their very eyes—so that they'll order you off the premises!"

"I wish," she sighed, "they'd order me off before Lottie swoops down upon us! Not that I mind *her*—but the terrific preparations we shall have to make!—and they'll expect me to help with it all—the cleaning, cooking, baking, scrubbing, sweeping, scouring!—oh, darn-gosh-devil-damn-hell, how I hate it!"

"Why on earth don't you go away while Eugene is gone?"

"I'd have to account for the money it takes."

"Didn't he leave you any?"

"He—didn't see that I'd need any money; any more than the little he thinks I have left of my own savings."

"Join him at Leitersville. I'll take you in, in my car."

"I—I don't know that he's there," she falteringly admitted, flushing with embarrassment in acknowledging her ignorance of his whereabouts. "We—we respect each other's right to personal privacy, Herrick. We—I don't ask questions."

"Well, if he respects your right to privacy as much as you respect his, then go away and don't account to him any more than he accounts to you. I tell you, my dear, he needs some wifely discipline!"

"Herrick don't you think that since I've married into this family, I must try to be one of them? Wouldn't it be selfish of me to run away from all this work they'll have to do for Lottie's visit with her husband and child?"

"I can't see that it's any least concern of yours, Nancy."

"You'll see how offended they'll be because I deserted this afternoon!"

"Let them take it out of me, then, for spiriting you away. What business have they to expect you to pare their peaches for them when you pay your board?"

"But there's Eugene's board, too, which is not paid for."

"Good heavens, they don't expect you to work for *his* board, do they?"

"Yes if *he* doesn't pay them anything. I'm afraid to offer them any more than I'm now paying, for I can see how puzzled they are at my savings going so far! I

think they are beginning to be just a little suspicious about the extraordinary elasticity of that small teaching salary of mine! I'm in constant dread of their letting it out to Eugene that I'm paying my board. All this duplicity is of course disgusting!" she added drearily.

"It is!" I agreed. "And, as I've told you, you can't keep it up. For Eugene's salvation as well as for your own, you've got to stop getting down on all fours before him! Stand up to him, Nancy! Slavery is almost as bad for the soul of the master as for that of the slave!"

"What nonsense, Herrick!—to talk of my slavery to Eugene!"

"It's bad for both of you and you must put an end to it!"

"He and I will soon be in our own home and then," she said hopefully, "things will of course be quite different."

"Not unless you take a stand."

"I'm trying to adapt myself, Herrick—to compromise with—"

"But you do it all—all the adapting and compromising! Let Eugene do a little of it!"

She was silent. Every mile that took us nearer the farm found our spirits falling like a barometer.

"I should think," I said, "that even Weesy would balk at working so hard for Lottie whom I gather she dislikes quite whole-heartedly."

"Weesy's awfully scared of Lottie! Thinks she's the grandest lady in the land! And Lottie ignores poor Weesy as though she were a worm!"

"Does Lottie ignore you, too?"

"If she only would! No, she labors to impress me. And when she sees how her labors are in vain, she concludes that Eugene has made the most lamentable mistake of his life! I'm not only poor and obscure and

incompetent; I'm not a loudly-professing Christian Church member or a hundred percent. American patriot who thinks that forcing an embittered alien to kiss our flag on his knees will create in his heart a loving loyalty to that flag! I'm not, it seems, properly concerned about what other people think of me, about appearances; I have no reverence; I don't stand in awe of my betters; I believe in outlandish things that genteel ladies never dream of believing—"

"How about Eugene's beliefs? Does she think them 'outlandish'?"

"She thinks he has 'beautiful thoughts.' I find, Herrick," added Nancy, perplexed, "so many people don't get hold of the radicalism of Eugene's ideas at all."

"He whitewashes the radicalism so that it's invisible to all but the initiated."

While she considered this in silence, we turned a corner and the farm house came in view.

CHAPTER XIV

THE Klam's attitude towards me when upon their arrival I was first presented to them in the "front room," seemed slightly aggressive; as though they rather resented me as an unwarranted intrusion. I suspected that their ground for this was the same thing that had driven Eugene from home—embarrassment before a sophisticated stranger for the crudity of the farm house and its inmates.

"Professor" Klam, a prancing little man with a neat, small black mustache, a red necktie, and a self-important air, put me in my place at once as an inferior; while Mrs. Klam, a big, handsome, very well dressed woman, tolerantly condescended to me.

However, when the elder Mrs. Curry almost immediately handed out to them the one fact concerning me that seemed always in her mind, it appeared to change the atmosphere with surprising promptness.

"He pays Yi and Weesy twenty dollars a week yet! Yes, mind if he don't! *He* don't think nothin' of that!" she said, undeterred by my presence from a discussion of my peculiarities. "See that there ottomobile out in the road standin'? *That* ain't no sich a common Ford car—that there's sich a Packard car that costs awful expensive, Lypholate says. Well, that there car's *hisn*. Money's awful plenty with him, Lypholate says. Lypholate knowed him at Leitersville."

"And," added Weesy, "he wears all silk shirts—ain't, Mister?" appealing to me for confirmation of the incredible. "And sich a all-white suit he calls 'my

flannens' (not meanin' winter underwear, mind you!) and he wears a silk *um*-brella that rolls up that nice and neat and skinny! When you think how easy a white suit gets dirty, it wonders me that a man would spend fur one."

"But money ain't nothin' to him, seems!" added Mrs. Curry, shaking her head hopelessly over such an unexplainable phenomenon, while the Klamms stood about in awkward embarrassment at all this shameless frankness. "I used to think ah-ver Lypholate dressed too expensive," Elypholate's mother continued, "but when I see the folks he travels with!"

"Has Eugene come home yet?" asked Mrs. Klam hastily, evidently anxious to cut short these painful personalities.

"No, he ain't come home yet."

"I hope his wife ain't been so inconsiderate as to go gadding off too, just when you're got the extra work of a boarder?" inquired Professor Klam officiously, recalling to my mind what Nancy had said about his being detested in Columbia as a busy-body.

"No, she's in the kitchen out, settin' the table fur me," answered Mrs. Curry. "I guess she'd be runnin', too, if she had the money. But I guess Lypholate didn't let none with her. Well, I'll let you here, now, with ah-ver boarder; you kin all entertain yourselves till I make dinner on the table onct."

The abrupt transformation from chilling aloofness to smiling affability as Mr. and Mrs. Klam graciously invited me to go with them to the front porch until we should be summoned to dinner, struck me as lacking in delicate shading.

Florence, their five year old child, spotlessly robed in white, looking like a mechanical wax doll, was carefully

placed, as though she were breakable bric-a-brac, on a cushion on the porch step at her mother's feet and told to sit still and not get dirty or mussed—which instructions the little girl, with a look of self-conscious virtue, obeyed so passively that, despite my weakness for children, I couldn't feel interested in her.

It was immediately apparent, however, that in her parents' eyes she was an altogether admirable product of their own superior excellence.

"No need to tell our Florence, Mamma, to keep clean," said the "Professor" boastfully as we all sat about on the big porch rocking-chairs. "She hates a speck of dirt on herself as much as you do!"—upon which the child sat up more primly than before, looking a degree more complacently virtuous.

"Well, the reason she hates dirt so much," Mrs. Klam explained to me, "is that I've never left her run round and get dirty like some children. Never once since she was born has our little Florence been what you might call really dirty."

"You see, Mr. Appleton, my wife ain't like so many of your stenerous modern women that want to encrouch on man's sphere and neglect their homes. With so many women these days, you know, if it ain't politics it's card parties or even mebbly gambling yet! Oh, to be sure, Mamma casts her vote like other ones, that's taken for granted, and of course a card party now and then, that's only reasonable and we're both of us always perfectly reasonable. I always believe in being reasonable in all things and not going to extremes. But Lottie is one of these mothers, don't you know, that keeps on the job. No neglected child round *our* happy home, left run as she pleases whilst her mother's out to card parties or wearin' out good shoe leather runnin' round shoppin' all

day or to political meetings! I bet you there ain't any child, I don't care if it's born in a millionaire's home or not, that gets the care and attention that our Florence gets!"

As I contemplated Mrs. Klam's large proportions, too florid complexion, rather steely blue eyes, firm lips, and the air of self-satisfaction that emanated from her presence, I felt that Florence's doom—a crushed and colorless personality—was a foregone conclusion.

"When I see how some children are left run!" she took up her husband's eulogy of her exemplary motherhood, "and how their matural training is not paid any attention to and they're left form untidy habits just because their parents won't sacrifice themselves to train them, well, I couldn't neglect my dooty like that! I couldn't say my prayers if I did! My dooty always did come first with me, didn't it, El?—before my pleasures. Nobody could ever say it of me that I put my own comfort before my dooty to Husband and Child and Home, could they, El?"

"Nobody'd better say it to me, anyhow!" responded El threateningly. "I wouldn't hesitate to tell *them* my opinion of them!"

"No, El never does hesitate," Mrs. Klam again explained to me, "to speak his mind. And it makes no difference who it's *to* either. He'd as soon tell the Governor or our Congressman or Mr. Jacob Leiter or any one at all, what he thinks about them as he'd tell the poorest laboring man! That's the way he is. He never stands back for any one, no matter who."

"Why *should* I?" inquired El smartly. "I don't admit any one's better'n me, no matter what he's got. An American citizen's any one's equal. A hundred percent.

American citizen, you can't go higher. That's honor enough for *me* anyhow."

"Then it naturally follows that you admit no American citizen as your inferior—even the poorest laboring man?"

"Well, I ain't a Bolshevik—or a Socialist," he demurred.

"No, I see you're not. There's no Socialist system that does not recognize and provide for what seem to Socialists (if not to you, Mr. Klam) to be natural inequalities."

"You're mistaken; Socialists want to reduce everything and everybody to a dead level of equality," affirmed Klam quite conclusively; "they want to wipe out the 'natural inequalities' to which you made reference to—which any one can see ain't sensible."

"It's only unnatural and artificial inequalities they want to wipe out. Didn't you bring overalls for Florence with you, Mrs. Klam, so that she can run round the farm and have some fun?"

"Overalls! My dotter always has and always shall wear skirts, Mr. Appleton! I don't even put rompers on her, they're so much like pants! I don't approve of those immodest things for little girls. I think it's often the first downward maural step!"

"This thing of girls wearin' pants, it's not nice," affirmed Elmer frowning.

"And I never leave Florence sit straddled on her hobby horse, but sideways," added Mrs. Klam. "I try to keep her little mind clean and her thotts pure and wholesome. I've taught her never to listen to dirty stories if other childern try to tell her any. And never to repeat any smutty words she hears."

"She's never heard a dirty story in her life," Elmer bragged. "To be sure, we're very careful, too, who she plays with. We don't leave her play with any children till we've inquahr'd if they're Christian-raised and good-mannered and clean-minded."

"You can't be too particular who your child associates with," said Mrs. Klam. "And El's just as particular as I am. Most fathers don't concern themselves. He's one father in a hundred, if I do say it."

"And I guess I ain't such a poor husband either, as husbands go; eh, wife?" Elmer demanded in a tone that expressed no modest, anxious doubt as to the impending reply.

"*You'll* do," she smiled coquettishly. "El's a husband this way," she elucidated it; "he appreciates his home. He certainly does appreciate how nice I always keep things and how I raise Florence. And he isn't one to run round and seek his pleasures outside his home."

"When I seek my pleasure, my wife seeks it along with me. When I go to a movie, she's right there along. Or a card party or an auto-trip or a day at Atlantic City, she's my companion and I'm hers."

"So many husbands don't appreciate a wife's efforts. But El isn't like that. He always seems to think," Mrs. Klam smiled again coquettishly, "that no one can do things quite like his little wife does!"

As she was almost twice his size, this kittenish playfulness was a bit weird.

"I don't think it, I know it!" maintained Elmer as to an opposing army. "If you can find another home conducted more scrupulous than mine is, show it to me! Leave Florence speak her piece for Mr. Appleton, Mamma."

"All right, El," Mrs. Klam, to my consternation, ac-

quiesced. "Come, Florence, stand up and speak your new hymn for the gentleman."

Too well trained in perfect obedience to demur, the child came primly forward and, with a stiff little bow that suggested a crude mechanism needing oil, she began perfunctorily to repeat with neat precision, to her parents' utter astonishment and mortification,

"'Old Dan Tucker he got drunk,
He fell in the fire and he kicked up a chunk;
A coal—'"

"*Florence!*" exclaimed her scandalized parents in unison—and Florence mechanically came to a dead stop.

"What on earth are you saying? Where did you learn that *naughty* piece?"

"That's the hymn Aunt Nancy taught me."

"*Taught* me, Florence—say 'taught me,'" commanded her mother.

"Taught me."

"Aunt Nancy hadn't ought to teach you such things!" cried her father. "The idea! We'll have to keep you away from Aunt Nancy if she spoils you like that!"

"I'm not at all surprised!" said Mrs. Klam stiffly, looking like the Day of Judgment. "Trying deliberately to corrupt the little clean mind of a child with a ribald drinking song! No, I'm not at all surprised! Indeed Florence *shall* be kept away from her Aunt Nancy!"

"It's a nursery rhyme, as of course you know, and not a drinking song," I ventured to put in.

"But I'm very careful what rhymes and stories I leave Florence hear," protested Mrs. Klam. "Some of Mother Goose I wouldn't leave her hear for anything; and indeed I think *all* of Mother Goose is so silly and has no meaning any how, that I don't see that it does a child any

good—it's not at all helpful or educative," she reasoned. "And lots of fairy stories, like such as Bluebeard, I wouldn't leave her listen to."

"Mamma uses her intelligent judgment about what Florence dare hear read to her," said Elmer. "Too many parents don't give attention to what their children hear read. That's not Mamma's way, leave me tell you!"

"Now, Florence, speak the hymn *Mamma* taught you—about 'When doomed to death—' "

Florence tried once more.

" 'When doomed to death, the apostle lay
At night in Herod's dungeon cell,
He combed his hair with a wagon wheel
And died with a toothache in his heel.' "

I shouted such a laugh that the mechanical child actually started; but Elmer, seeing his wife's grim displeasure, bit his lip hard to suppress his own inclination to laugh.

"That will do, Florence. Mamma's not pleased with you at all. You can go and sit down. And you can't have any dessert at dinner."

The child's lips quivered, tears filled her eyes and she began to whimper.

"Florence!" warned her mother solemnly—and the whimpering ceased abruptly, as at the press of a button.

"I never leave her cry," Mrs. Klam said. "She's been trained not to from little up."

I caught the child to me as she was returning to her cushion, set her on my knee and, to divert her from her distress, showed her my watch with chimes.

"Don't leave her hold it, she might drop it," warned Mrs. Klam. "I never leave El give her his watch to hold that I gave him for a wedding present."

"You bet I'm careful of that watch! If I'd lose that watch, I'd lose my home!" declared Elmer, upon which he and his wife laughed and laughed again with prolonged enjoyment of his humor.

"You bet I'd never have dare to face Lottie again without that watch!" he expanded the joke delightedly, while I made the chimes ring for Florence's entertainment.

"I take it, Mr. Appleton," he turned to me when the joke appeared to have been exhausted, "that you're a professional man?"

"What profession do you 'take it'?" I asked.

"Well, now," he said, regarding me speculatively, "I couldn't just to place you there. Not in my perfession, I take it. I'm a professional musician myself. Greatest art on the map, music! Ain't it the art though? Got all the other arts skint, if you ask me! No, you ain't a musician, I take it. A lawyer mebbby? No," he quickly decided, looking perplexed. "Don't know as I *can* place you ezactly. And I'm generally pretty sharp at sizing up a man. Get his number generally as soon as I look at him! You ain't a college proff? No? And you don't look to be a business man—I'm acquainted with all the gents of our Chamber of Commerce in Columby and you ain't their style."

"Thank God for that!"

"Oh, but they're our best citizens, the men of our Chamber of Commerce!"

"Who make our great country what it is, heh? Yes, I know what disinterested 'best citizens' they are—how earnestly they consider and act for the best interests of the few at the cost of the many!—and oppose every measure that, however it might benefit the general public, might shave off a few of their own special privileges. 'Best citizens'!" I laughed.

Professor Klam looked at me doubtfully. "But I gathered from mother-in-law's and sister-in-law's remarks that *you* were one of those same best citizens who enjoy 'special privileges.' But you sure don't sound like one! Sounds more like the way these sore heads talk that can't get up in the world! Now me, I never grudge other men their money. I'm glad to see 'em pile it up. Looks good to me! Shows this *is* for sure the land o' opportunity and some day I'll mebbly get the chance to make *my* little pile!"

"How? By the service you give to society through teaching music?"

"No such slow way for mine! Music's all right for an art or a perfesh, but not as a money maker. Speculation's the thing! Cute speculation. I got some dough laid back to use any time I can get the dope on some deal that's a get-rich-quick stunt. See?"

"I see."

"I thought it was only the unsuccessful that slammed our American institootions, Mr. Appleton, so I'm surprised *at* you, you being as well-fixed as mother-in-law and sister-in-law led me to doodooce. I'm a hundred percent. American myself and I think this country's the best Gawd ever made!—and the man that don't like it, especially your dirty foreigners, better get—"

"—out-and-go-back-home-where-it's-worse," I interrupted. "Can't you be more original than that, Professor? Next thing you'll be handing me out that other bromide—that we're not going to tolerate in this fair land of ours any man that's so unintelligent and such a poor citizen as to be dissatisfied with our government—a government where senators and congressman exchange favors in a cold-blooded give and take for their own constituents and their own personal interests; a system

of rotten deals!—our noble law makers voting for tariff schedules which they know to be a wholesale robbery of the public—‘getting theirs while the getting is good’—dishonest incompetents without vision, without statesmanship! How long are the American people going to be such sodden asses as to put up with it?”

“Gee, ain’t you bitter though! Evidently you ain’t a Harding Republican,” said the professor considering me thoughtfully, the instinctive disapproval he felt for my sentiments modified by the fact (which he had been led to believe) that I belonged to the very class whose “special privileges” I assailed.

“But I can’t see,” he added, “that the Democrats are any more pertikkler. Look at Wilson’s Admin—”

“I prefer not to, it would spoil my dinner.”

“Every time the Democrats get in they near leave the country go to perdition!”

“El!” Mrs. Klam reproved him, “that’s as good as swearing—perdition means—*you* know!”

“But that’s why I used ‘perdition’ instead of that other word, Mamma, in front of Florence.”

Mrs. Klam drew my attention to this parental thoughtfulness. “Well, you wouldn’t find many fathers thinking that far, now would you, Mr. Appleton?”

“Most fathers,” added Elmer, before I could reply, “don’t stop at saying anything at all in front of their children. But I ain’t that kind of a parent! I always think twice before I speak in front of Florence.”

“And then to have my sister-in-law try to spoil Florence for me!” Mrs. Klam said indignantly.

“Yes, Nancy sure does try to exert a friv-u-lous infloonce over little Florence!” added Elmer, also indignantly.

“And here I’d been hoping that when we lived in Leiters-

ville," said Mrs. Klam, "that I could let Florence with her Aunt Nancy whenever El and I wanted to *go* a little; if, for instance, we felt like going to a movie or to a card party or to make a call or so on our neighbors. But dear me, if I ever did let her with Nancy, I'd be worried every minute, wondering what badness she was teaching her!—things no nicely raised child ought to hear! So of course I *can't* ever let her with Nancy when El and I want to go."

"No, you'll have to forego the privilege, certainly, of using Mrs. Eugene as your child's nurse," I said sympathetically. "You'll be driven to taking Florence with you to the movies."

"But we're very careful what movies we take her along to," Elmer assured me.

"I'd be ashamed to be seen taking a little innocent child along to some movies I've seen already," said Mrs. Klam.

"Oh, but now, Mamma, I don't know as we should feel *ashamed*—very nice people have their children along."

Mrs. Klam thoughtfully conceded, "Yes, that's so; I guess we wouldn't need to feel just to say ashamed, so long as we saw nice people there with their children. And to be sure, some of the pictures are quite educational and instructive. Now here last night there were some pictures of hell taken from a book called 'Dante's Inferno' that would be good for any Christian-raised child to see."

Professor Klam frowned intelligently. "Now let's see, who was it, Mamma, that wrote that book, 'Dante's Inferno'?" he asked.

"I think Dante's the author's name, El, and he wrote this book called 'Dante's Inferno.'"

"His latest?"

"But he's not living any more, El. Don't you remember it showed a picture of 'Dante's Death'?"

"I must have dozed off just then. Apt to get drowsy except when the funnies are on. Die recently?"

"Well, I—he was a foreigner," said Mrs. Klam doubtfully. "A Spaniard. Do *you* know when he died, Mr. Appleton?"

"He's been dead quite a while; since 1321 A. D."

"Oh, a classic writer," nodded Elmer briskly.

Mrs. Klam rather abruptly changed the subject. "It's to be hoped," she sighed, "that my poor brother will remain childless, for it certainly would be hard on a man as fine as what he is to see his children raised so uncultured and crude as what Nancy would raise hers—teaching them drinking songs yet! You know what a wonderfully fine man Brother is, Mr. Appleton! A man that could have married so much better and—oh, well!" she broke off mournfully, "it's done now and can't be helped!"

"Of all sa-ad words of tongue or pen, the sa-addest are that it might have ben,'" quoted Elmer feelingly. "Ye-es, I fear Brother-in-law sure did throw himself away when he picked his wife! Unsuitable match every way you look at it—soash-ly, fynansh-ly, intellec-shly, maur-ly. Now me, when I picked my wife, I showed judgment! Heh, Mamma?"

"Oh, El!" Mrs. Klam smilingly protested. "But Eugene didn't 'pick' his wife, El, she picked him and worked on his tender feelings to make him marry her all of a sudden before he really knew what he was doing!"

"Yes, it ain't credulous that Brother-in-law would have been so blind as to what he owed himself and his position if he hadn't o' been you might say worked on. She won't even make him a good housekeeper."

"*Even* a good housekeeper, El!" protested Mrs. Klam. "I consider that the chief essential for a wife! And you say 'even a good housekeeper'!"

"But still it might be overlooked a little that she ain't a good housekeeper if she'd brought him money or high society or even intellec-*shal*-ty and high maurals. But when she's got none of 'em and *still* can't housekeep—"

"Not one of those qualities, El, would make up," firmly maintained Mrs. Klam, "for poor housekeeping, which can't be overlooked in a wife however high her station or large her fortune or great her intellect or pure her maurals."

"Well, to be sure, *I* wouldn't stand for poor house-keeping, no matter what else my wife brought me," Elmer gave in.

"And the worst thing about her, Mr. Appleton," Mrs. Klam sorrowfully added, "is she don't seem to feel how infer-or she is to my brother. You know what my brother is. Well, she acts just as if she was perfectly worthy of him!—where she *ought* to be humble and grateful!"

"Grateful? What for?" I asked.

"Why," she explained, a shade of impatience in her tone at my dullness, "for being the wife of such a man as Brother, when she couldn't rightly have looked to marrying a man in *his* position. But she just takes it as a matter of course! Won't even leave me help her, as I so gladly would, to fit herself better to fill her social position as his wife. I could help her so much with my advice—I've gone out so much in society in Columbia. But the trouble with Nancy is she don't see she needs any advice. If I offer her any, she's just as likely as not to laugh! Yes, laugh yet! To think of Brother Eugene marrying such a light-minded person and him what he is!"

"He has the best of the bargain in one point, however," I said, lifting Florence from my knee and rising; "his wife has not endowed him with five in-laws to love him and be kind to him!"

And with a smile and a little ceremonious bow, I strolled away to go in search of Nancy—leaving them to digest it.

CHAPTER XV

I FOUND her carrying chairs from the "front room" to the long dinner table laid in the kitchen. She had been working since daybreak and was looking fagged.

"Go and sit down," I ordered her, taking a chair from her. "How many more of these do you want carried out?"

"Two. Oh, I'm tired," she sighed, sinking upon the settee against the wall. "Would it be very low-down, Herrick," she asked as I returned from my task and sat down beside her, "to plot with you to kidnap me right after dinner and take me motoring, so that I can escape the awful dish washing and clearing up?"

"You and that pitiable child, Florence, are going to be snatched away under their very noses directly after dinner," I assured her. "Let Mrs. Klam help with the work—it's her mother's house. Are you weak-minded, Nancy, to let that husky woman sit about and take her comfort while you drudge for her and her family? I've no patience with you, my dear!"

"But both she and Eugene are always treated as very grand company. Lottie never lifts a finger to help when she visits here."

"And you fall right in line with Weesy and Mrs. Curry and abjectly work yourself weary for her and her little shrimp of a husband!"

"Not for them; I can't see old Mrs. Curry and Weesy so overworked, Herrick."

"If Mrs. Klam can stand it—her own mother—"

"What she can stand is irrelevant, my dear. I shall feel a pig, running away after dinner! But I'm awfully tired! And then there's the waiting on the table—"

"You are not going to play waitress to Mr. and Mrs. Klam if I have to tie you up!"

"How can you take the Klams so seriously, my dear? They're not the least little bit on my mind. Weesy can't serve the dinner alone and if I don't help, Mrs. Curry will."

"Mrs. Klam would sit still and let her mother wait on her?"

"She's done that all her life."

"Well, you shan't wait on her and that's flat! If you try it, I'll make a scene. I warn you!"

"Herrick!" she fearfully whispered, "you *will* be careful not to betray—"

"I shan't care what I betray if you dare to wait on that dinner table!"

In spite of the fear in her eyes, she suddenly laughed. "You who believe in the dignity of labor! And you call Eugene inconsistent!"

"But it's your waiting on that Klam family that I won't tolerate!"

"You compliment them too much. Why, Herrick, they're as negligible as clams. I'm afraid that's almost a pun!"

"I'll overlook even a pun if you'll promise not to wait on the table."

It was a few moments later, when I was making Nancy laugh almost merrily by my account of Florence's weird combination of John the Baptist and Old Dan Tucker, that Weesy, hot and tired, hurrying in from the kitchen with a great platter of stewed chicken, turned upon Nancy in sullen resentment.

"You're got time to set down to talk and laugh and enjoy yourself, ain't?—just when dinner must be dished up!"

I realized, if poor Weesy did not, that the bitterness she felt was not provoked at all by Nancy's defection, but by the presence of the Klams who, after causing her to work so hard all day, would reward her by ignoring her; and she, being too overawed by them to rebel, was moved to take it out on Nancy by whom she was not at all overawed.

I laid a detaining hand upon Nancy as she would have risen. "Sit still—I'll help—you're too tired."

It was against the most embarrassed and vehement protests from both Weesy and Mrs. Curry that I carried in from the "summer kitchen" vegetables, pies, pickles, jellies, bread, cake—God knows what!

"It's a wonder, Nancy," Mrs. Curry the while upbraided her daughter-in-law who rested from her labors on the settee, "that it wouldn't give you a shamed face to leave ah-ver boarder help whiles you set!"

"But she's a boarder too," I could not help throwing in.

"Yes, well, but that's different, too, again," argued Mrs. Curry.

Nancy, undisturbed by their reproaches, amused herself by ordering me about as I tried to help—to the further consternation of Weesy and Mrs. Curry, who seemed to consider that a man who paid twenty dollars a week unprotestingly for board, was one to be treated as a Sultan by serfs.

"Put the cake at this end," she directed me. "The bread over there. The cream in the middle by the sugar bowl—to be in reach of all, don't you see? Now hurry

up and bring in the water and fill the glasses—watch out, you're slopping the table cloth—don't you dare to! Yes, put the pitcher there. Donkey! Your elbow's in the butter!"

"Nancy!" whispered Mrs. Curry aghast. "He'll up and leave if you sass him so! Get up and work yourself and don't expect *him* to do it! The wery idea!"

A meditative look had come into Nancy's eyes that made me curious. "Do you know," she said in a low voice, when the big dinner bell had been rung and we were for a moment alone while waiting for the guests to come in from the porch, "Eugene would think himself outraged if I sat still and let him do what you've just done?"

"But you would not feel outraged if he sat still and let *you* do it! If you ask me, I think Love seems to have robbed you of your common sense! You spoil Eugene as ridiculously as the rest of this family do!"

The entrance of the Klams, leading Florence between them checked her reply. But her gravely thoughtful expression as we took our places, made me hopeful.

"Well, well, well, this smells fragrant!" Professor Klam exulted greedily, his eyes glittering as he surveyed the loaded table. "You sure are a good purvider, Yi—that I must give you."

When Nancy with the rest of us sat down to the table instead of standing by with Weesy as she was evidently expected to do, to fill our coffee cups, replenish the vegetable dishes, pour the water, cut more bread, they all regarded her with displeased surprise.

As soon as little Florence, at her mother's direction, had "asked the blessing," Mrs. Curry rose heavily from her chair.

"I'll help Weesy if Nancy won't," she wearily announced; and as Nancy would have yielded and risen, I interposed.

"Sit down, Mrs. Curry," I said to the old woman. "We two husky men are not going to let you wait on us, are we, Professor? It's up to you and me—Yi's been working in the field all morning."

Professor Klam laughed pleasantly at my humorous suggestion. "Lottie wouldn't leave her husband do a woman's work. She's too wifely!"

"Well, I should hope!" said Lottie. "Are you sick, Nancy?"

"Ill? I? Why, no, what makes you think so?"

"Well, since you're not helping Weesy—"

"I hope, Mrs. Klam," I said solicitously, "you're not ill?"

"No," she answered in surprise, "what makes you—oh!" as light dawned, "but I'm a visitor you know," she smiled, "and Nancy's living here."

"Boarding for the summer—like me," I nodded. "Well, then, I'm waiter," I concluded, rising and seizing the huge platter of bread.

From every one but Nancy came indignant protests, to which I remained impervious. It was painfully mortifying to them all, but especially to Mrs. Curry and Weesy, to have me so demean myself as to wait upon them.

During the progress of the meal, as I awkwardly and inefficiently performed my job, I could see from the disapproving looks that continued to be cast upon Nancy, that they all held her responsible for this embarrassing situation. It seemed to rouse the imp that I had known in her of old, for she met their implied criticism by further shocking them with her autocratic orders to me.

"Attention to business, waiter, pour the water."
"Look, serf, don't you see the bread plate's empty?"

When Elmer wanted more coffee and Weesy was at the time refilling the chicken platter, I saw him, instead of asking me to get it for him, consult with his wife aside—whereupon she, with a glance at Nancy expressing her sense of personal injury, said, as she picked up his cup and rose, "I'll get it for you, El!"

But as she came back from the kitchen, Nancy was holding out her own cup to me. "Coffee, waiter, and see that you don't let any grounds get into my cup, if you don't want a calling-down."

As I deferentially took her cup, Mrs. Klam gravely asked her, "Do you think, Nancy, you'd be acting up so familiarly with a strange gentleman if your *husband* was here?"

"But is a waiter a gentleman, that's the question?" said Nancy flippantly. "If you want to see the lengths to which I *can* go in 'acting up familiarly with a strange gentleman,' Lottie, bring on your 'strange gentleman'! The stranger, the better!"

"I wish, Nancy," Mrs. Klam retorted, "you'd stop flirting right in front of little Florence!"

"Am I flirting? Now I've often wondered what, really, flirting *was*. And I don't know that I yet see—"

"Little Florence ain't used to seeing such friv-u-lous conduct!" frowned Elmer.

"And I don't want her to get such ideas into her clean little mind!" protested Lottie.

"But my dear Angel-Wings, *what* ideas?" asked Nancy.

"Kindly don't call me nicknames, Nancy! You're putting thotts into Florence's mind that I've always tried to shield her from! Your influence on her—"

"May, let us hope, give your poor child a few redeeming vices!" Nancy recklessly inserted.

When, upon my return with her coffee, she further commanded my services,—“Now, waiter, some chicken, and I’ll tip you with a kiss!”—Elmer regarded her darkly. “When the cat’s away,” he said insinuatingly. “I never saw you cut up so light-headed!”

“This kind of behavior, Nancy,” Mrs. Klam seriously admonished her, “was bad enough when you were a single girl! Oh, yes, we used to hear rumors—of how you flirted with your male pu-pills,” she pronounced with conscientious precision.

“My favorite male pu-pill was Jake Hogentoggler and my chief pastime,” said Nancy with pensive tenderness, “was kissing Jake. I made him stop after school every day for my parting kiss. How I loved that male pu-pill! I suppose it did cause ‘rumors.’ But now,” she sighed, “I have to be content with kissing his photograph.”

Mrs. Klam actually blushed for her. “I won’t leave my dotter hear such shameless—”

“Yes, well, but Lottie,” interceded her mother, “Nancy’s only plaguin’ you—Jake Hogentoggler’s six years old.”

Mrs. Klam looked disgusted. “I certainly would think, Nancy, that being married to a man like Eugene, you’d settle down and not be so flippant!”

“Settling down is so apt to produce flatness, not to say fatness,” said Nancy with a glance at Lottie’s large proportions. “Waiter, darling,” she addressed me, “hop ’round with the celery and be spry about it!”

I wondered, as I obeyed her, how Eugene, if he had been here, would have taken this sprightliness, not to say hilarity. But having been a witness to his surprisingly

subduing effect upon his wife, I was inclined to agree with the Klams that she never would have let herself go like this before him.

Through all the meal Mr. and Mrs. Klam kept up their monologues of self-admiration; but here in the bosom of the family these ego-eulogies mostly took the form of an implied or expressed criticism of the inferiority of the others. For instance, Weesy's sudden exclamation, nearly dropping a dish as she uttered it, "There runs one of them field mice agin!"—brought from Lottie the assertion that *her* manner of housekeeping eliminated such irrelevancies as mice.

"Didn't you never have a mice in your house, Lottie?" Weesy, looking offended, inquired.

"Just once a mouse did somehow (I never did account for it) get into my kitchen; but I scarcely slept or eat, night or day, until I had caught it, though it took nearly a week of trap-setting, cleaning up, poison baiting—and if I hadn't done that way, *my* house would have been overrun too. To be sure, you can't keep house right without taking trouble."

"I got other things to do besides chasing a mice fur a whole week!" Weesy pouted.

"Nothing more important," insisted Lottie; and here followed a minute account of the unflagging zeal with which she had pursued that agile and adroit mouse that had once had the temerity to enter her spotless Christian home; its skill and cunning in eluding both her vigilance and her many devices for capturing it; its audaciously appearing now and then for an instant just to "taunt" her and let her know it was still there; its trickily misleading her from one part of the house to another; and when she recounted at last her triumphant finale, almost a *Te Deum*, I mourned the sad end of that

adventurous rodent whose evident sense of humor had been its undoing.

"So you see," she concluded, "no one would have mice about if they'd take the trouble I take."

The subject of the mouse having been at last exhausted, I tried but failed to follow her mentally through her long, detailed elucidation of her own superior, intricate and tedious process of disposing of her garbage, the various complicated stages of drying, dividing, wetting, mixing, burning, sunning, drowning, burying her garbage. You would have supposed that she thought of nothing but garbage from early morn till dewy eve!

"If the waiter may talk in," I said, as I stood over her with the water pitcher, "how do you ever find time, Mrs. Klam, from your devoted service to Garbage, to serve your God, your family and your Country?"

"Please, Mr. Appleton," she gently protested, "I must ask you not to use the name of God and Country so lightly in front of little Florence, we're trying so hard to teach her reverence."

"There's far too little reverence these days," said Elmer. "If reverence was inculcated more in the Home—"

"To hear yous Klams talking about raisin' your Florence," sighed Weesy when Elmer concluded a harangue about Reverence in the Home, "it makes me more satisfied I ain't got no childern to raise, fur I couldn't do it right! My baby died fur me," she explained to me while the whole family listened, the Klams with a look of patient endurance, "when it was five months old a'ready. I tried so hard to keep it, but it went. And now, I guess, for all, it's better it went, fur I couldn't o' raised it like what Lottie thinks you must raise a child! I

guess I permitted an awful sin when I tried so hard to save it!"

"Com-mitted a sin, you mean," Elmer corrected her.

"And anyhow," continued Weesy, ignoring the correction, "the doctor sayed if it had of lived it would have been a warf, fur it had ammonia and sich yaller yanders."

"Gracious, what's a 'warf' and 'yaller yanders,' Weesy?" asked Nancy wonderingly.

"A warf's a undergrowed person," Weesy explained.

"You mean a dwarf, Weesy," Elmer again corrected her, "and yellow jaundice."

"Och, well," retorted Weesy, "if *you'd* lost your front teeth, El, and had your new false ones in, I guess you couldn't talk grammar neither! *What* is it you want, Florence?" she inquired of the little girl who, pointing to a vacant spot on her large dinner plate, was asking for something rather indistinctly because her mouth was full of food. "Eat your mouth empty before you say," Weesy advised.

Florence swallowed and spoke. "I want something for that place, Aunt Weesy," she said, pointing to the empty space on her plate.

"Well, what is it you want me to put there?—a dab o' potato or a chunk o' chicken or some tomats or what?"

"Some *what*," put in Elmer facetiously.

"A dab o' potato," Florence replied, and as Weesy obeyed, Mrs. Klam rebuked both her sister-in-law and her child.

"You see, Weesy, how quick Florence imitates your expressions! 'A dab o' potato'! *Please* be careful of your expressions before Florence! Now, Florence, ask Aunt Weesy nicely for some potato and don't say 'dab o' potato.' How do you ask her nicely?"

Florence, nearly in tears with self-consciousness and embarrassment at being the center of attention under reproof, was in the throes of struggling to "ask nicely," when Yi, for the first time during the meal, broke his bovine silence and interrupted her. "You're permitting a worse sin now, Weesy, than when you tried to save ah-ver baby!—by not turnin' plain and givin' yourself up!"

Again the glitter in his eyes made me shiver, it was so evident to me that his fanatical religious fear was more and more becoming with him a dangerous obsession. I would be glad when Nancy was safely out of this house; away from the chance of becoming involved, a second time in her life, in a hideous tragedy.

"I gotta to stand an awful lot for your sake, Yi, workin' fur all your folks so much," said Weesy sulkily, "and I ain't standin' yet fur bein' bothered all the time about my religion!"

"No, Mr. Appleton, no ice cream for Florence," Mrs. Klam regretfully, but firmly, interposed as I placed a saucer before the child. "You remember I told her on the porch she couldn't have her dessert to-day—and," she added, passing the saucer on to Yi, "I always keep my word to my child. Mamma's very sorry, Florence, but she must keep her word."

Florence's lip quivered and her small body stiffened to hold back the crying which was a forbidden indulgence. Her father offered a feeble protest. "It wasn't rightly her fault, Mamma, when you come to think of it. Her Aunt Nancy—"

"I know that, El. But Florence must learn not to repeat things her Aunt Nancy tries to teach her. You heard me say she couldn't have any dessert, didn't you?

Well, did you ever know me not to keep my word to Florence?"

"Indeed I never did, Mamma!"

Mrs. Klam, while she ate her own large plate of ice cream, explained to the company her methods. "If I say to Florence that I will reward or punish her, she knows I'll do it. Because I never fail to keep my word to her. A parent that says she's going to punish and then fails to do it, loses a child's respect and trust. I never do that! A child respects a parent when she knows you'll never break your word. Now, Florence, now!" she said warningly as the martyred child began to sob, "you know what Mamma does when you cry!"—and Florence, looking frightened, choked back her crying.

When the meal was over, Mr. and Mrs. Klam, leading Florence between them, started for the front porch, but I, sitting down with Weesy to our belated dinner, stopped them.

"Hi, Professor, it's your turn now. Bring me some coffee, will you, and hot chicken from the kitchen?"

"Nancy's done; *she'll* wait on you," he retorted. "I never yet in my life waited on table and I don't intend to begin now!"

"Neither did I, Elmer," said Nancy, "and I don't intend to begin now either."

The elder Mrs. Curry rose heavily. "I'll wait on you, Mr. Appleton, if Nancy's too high-minded to."

"But your daughter's not going to let you, Mrs. Curry; are you, Mrs. Klam?" I interposed, while Mr. and Mrs. Klam stood regarding me doubtfully, uncertainly. "You go and sit on the porch, Mrs. Curry; shan't she, Mrs. Klam?"

"Of course you must not overtax yourself, Mother,"

said Mrs. Klam perfunctorily; "you better come on out on the porch with us."

"But I can't let Weesy to do all," objected Mrs. Curry. "It's too much, if Nancy won't help."

"Say, Nancy," Elmer here demanded quite impertinently, "what's over you, anyhow? What would your husband think of your refusing to help his folks?"

"He would think too highly of his dear sister, your wife, Professor, to suppose *she* wouldn't 'help his folks,' as you naïvely express yourself, dear Professor; to suppose she wouldn't set an example of filial duty to Florence."

"When I come home for a day's visit, I am expected to wait on the boarder?" asked Mrs. Klam in a tone of ominous quiet.

"If I was Yi," Elmer again spoke in, "I wouldn't *leave* my wife do more'n Lypholate's wife!"

"Nor would Eugene wish it otherwise, Nancy," added Mrs. Klam, "as you very well know."

Yi, with evidently no least interest in the dispute, took his hat from a hook in the wall and left the room.

Surreptitiously I whispered to Weesy at my side, "Eat your dinner, then get a headache and go to bed, so that Mrs. Klam will *have* to help her mother!" I suddenly rose from the table and before the startled eyes of them all I snatched up Nancy, threw her over my shoulder, seized small Florence, perched her *straddled* over my other shoulder, and made for my car—followed by frightened looks which proclaimed a suspicion as to my sanity. "We'll be home by supper time!" I called back to the dumb-stricken group that from the doorway stared after us in helpless consternation, the Klams too stunned to make even a move to rescue their clean-minded child from her compromising posture on my shoulder.

CHAPTER XVI

“**W**HERE’S the nearest ‘ice cream parlor’ where we can give this child the dessert she craves?” I demanded as we rode away.

It was evident that Florence, seated on her Aunt Nancy’s lap, nestling against her confidently, almost lovingly, did not share the family disapproval of her new relative.

“We must not undermine family discipline,” Nancy admonished me. “It isn’t your dessert, Florence, that we’re going to give you, but a post-prandial provender—don’t forget.”

“But—but Mamma says I *mustn’t* remember the smutty words you teach me!”

Nancy looked at me and shook her head hopelessly. “Think of a child of five knowing such a word as ‘smutty’ and having the idea constantly thrust upon her of evil lurking in everything!”

“Something should be done about it,” I growled, “before it’s too late! Where’s the ice cream parlor?”

“In Virginsville, the scene of my dazzling pedagogical career. Look for a sign:—

JACOB FENSTENMACHER, DENTIST, DOCTOR,
LAWYER, PREACHER. ALSO HOME-MADE
ICE CREAM FOR SALE.

I didn’t believe her, but a ten minutes ride brought us up to the sign. While Florence, without any scruples, ate her ice cream, the gentleman of many professions

who served it, inquired sympathetically whether we needed dental services—or perhaps a physician?—then perhaps, with matrimony in view, did we desire the services of a minister of the Gawspel? He only stopped short of asking us whether we wanted a lawyer for divorce proceedings—at which question I would have been glad to take him up in Nancy's behalf.

"You've spoiled the day for Angel-Wings," she told me when we were once more in the car flying through the country. "She *was* enjoying herself impressing you and disapproving of me! She hadn't counted on sitting 'round all day with just her mother. Weesy says Lottie hardly ever visited them before I came to the farm. She seems to revel in her delightful sense of injury at my hands for having 'snitched' her brother! That's what she actually thinks, or thinks she thinks, I did!"

"If she was trying to impress me, she succeeded!"

"She's desolated, I'm sure, at our flight!"

"Not to mention our kidnapping her child and subjecting her immaculate purity to your pernicious influence for several hours!"

"She'll fumigate her when she gets her back!"

"And when I consider, my dear, how spotlessly pure you'd instantly become in their eyes the moment they learned of your comfortable income—"

She checked me with a look of fright, indicating, over Florence's head, her apprehension lest the child understand.

"Look here, Nancy," I changed the subject, "I'm worried about Yi. He's brooding too much! Looks bad to me!"

"Poor badgered Weesy! She says he talks religion to her half the night. But he might as well talk to the mat-tress. She's as obstinate as a mule."

"I tell you he's going dippy about his salvation! That's another reason why I shall be very glad when you get away from here. There's no telling what a fellow in Yi's mental state may do! You must not consider coming back here next summer. Promise!"

"I'll make no more promises, my dear. How can I tell what I shall do or how I shall feel next summer?"

"Well, I'm building a good deal upon the hope that a year's time may restore your common sense! Maybe by next summer you'll have developed to the point of letting me run away with you to Italy or Egypt!"

"Fancy Angel-Wings hearing you say it!"

"Do you think she's washing the dishes? Weesy agreed to go to bed with a headache, so I suppose Mrs. Klam has *had* to turn in and help."

"If we didn't have Florence with us, I'm sure she would go straight home before she'd wash all those dishes."

"Florence, if your mother and father go home without you, will you like staying out here with Aunt Nancy a few days?" I asked.

"But I haven't any clean clothes along."

"But in the country nice children always get dirty. Only bad children stay clean. I'd show you how to make mud pies. I'm sure you never made mud pies, did you?"

"No sir. I darsent play in the mud."

"But in the country you *must* play in the mud and get as dirty as possible."

"I don't like to be dirty. I like to be nice and clean."

"I'm afraid, Nancy, she's past depraving."

"Do you know," said Nancy anxiously, "Eugene agrees with his sister that children should never be allowed to get dirty! He says if he had a child he'd make a scene every time he found its hands dirty, he thinks it's so unsanitary—while my own idea is that a child who never

got its hands dirty would be fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils. Of course I admit the desirability of a child's being scrubbed at least once a day. The only kind of dirty children I object to are those who have been uninterruptedly dirty for more than a day. If Eugene and I have children, that question of dirty hands is going to be a breaking-point! Queer thing," she went on meditatively, "that Eugene should highly approve of such an artificial person as Lottie, when he says in one of his lectures, 'None of us knows how base we are because none of us are natural. We've forgotten, under civilization, how to be natural!' He approves of Lottie's way with Florence—a discipline of fear!—yet he said once in a lecture, 'Punishing the sinner doesn't help him to get rid of his sin any more than punishing a poor man for his poverty would help him to riches.' Do you know, Eugene bewilders me sometimes a little!"

"You'll learn to understand him—some day," I said cryptically—and to cover my feelings I pressed the accelerator so sharply that we almost took a header over the dashboard.

When two hours later we were returning to the farm, I was glad to see how unconcerned Nancy was as to the criticism she was bound to meet there for her lurid flight with me.

"If only," I thought, "she could be equally independent of Eugene's opinion of her!"

"Looking for Eugene back soon?" I asked as we turned into the lane leading to the house.

"I—don't know. He wrote me from Leitersville asking me to let him know when you had gone and I answered that you had decided to stay on for the rest of the summer. He wrote back that in that case he would remain in Leitersville and I answered that in *that* case I would

join him there at once, as I refused absolutely to stay here at the farm without him."

"And what did he say to that?"

"I've had no answer—yet. His mother had a letter—" She hesitated.

"Yes?" I urged.

"—suggesting that if she wanted her son at home, she must not have summer boarders. Yi replied to it."

"Well? What did Yi reply to it?"

"I didn't see his letter."

"But you know very well what he wrote. So do I. Yi hospitably and fraternally informed Eugene that if it was a choice between a paying and a free guest, he'd keep the paying guest!"

"I don't know why I discuss these sordid things with you!" Nancy frowned.

"Has Eugene answered Yi's letter?"

"Not yet."

"When are you going to join him?"

"Oh, Herrick, I do hate to go to him unless—unless he sends for me; unless he wants me as much as I want him!" she faltered, her voice choked.

"Go to the mountains or the shore—no, I know you can't do that and keep your secret.—Hello! Look!"

We were drawing up to the porch steps and Nancy, glancing up at my sudden exclamation, saw, seated on a porch rocking-chair, between Mr. and Mrs. Klam, her husband.

Her face went white, her bosom heaved tremulously, and that look stole into her eyes which she so often wore in his presence, an expression of anxious uncertainty so uncharacteristic of her as she used to be that I always intensely resented it. Love, I bitterly reflected, was almost making a coward of her!

Yet startled as she evidently was by his sudden and unexpected return—by his catching her red-handed, as it were, in her truancy from duty—the irrepressible joy that the sight of him caused her, shone through her uneasiness. Quickly the color came back to her cheeks, and her eyes, in spite of their anxiety, sparkled with eagerness. Oh, there could be no doubt that she loved him! Probably he gave her some reason to, since she was not a fool.

He rose from the rocking-chair and came slowly down the steps to the car, his face extremely grave, almost forbidding.

"Back at last!" he greeted us rather distantly, shaking hands with me, kissing his niece as he lifted her to the ground, then giving his hand to Nancy to help her down. He tilted up her face to kiss her and instantly the touch of her lips was too much for him; the disapproving aloofness with which I could see he *wanted* to treat her deflections from her duty, as of course reported to him by his sister, broke down before the radiant sight of her youthful freshness and sweetness, all his own, from which for ten days he had been absent. The lover in him came quickly to life and he clasped and held her close, his face buried in her white neck.

I did not enjoy the picture, so I turned away and went up the porch steps to the Klams.

Florence was relating to her bewildered parents that Mr. Appleton was going to run away with Aunt Nancy to that country shaped like a boot where dirty Dagoes came from, and that Aunt Nancy had gotten her some ice cream.

"Not dessert, Mamma. Aunt Nancy said it wasn't dessert, but some smutty name that I forgot, like you said I was to."

"It was I got you the ice cream, Florence," I interposed. "Don't give Aunt Nancy the credit."

"What's all this about you and Nancy running off to Italy?" Elmer inquired, eyeing me suspiciously.

"Nothing doing, I'm afraid, Professor. She refuses to come with me, though I offered her a villa, a yacht, a Rolls Royce and an airship. She turned me down flat!"

"A person never can tell, Mr. Appleton," smiled Mrs. Klam, "when you are serious and when you are only cutting up."

"Easiest thing in the world to tell, because I never am serious."

"Oh, come now, Mr. Appleton, Eugene says you're very intellec-shal and litter-airy."

"That's why I'm never serious."

She was diverted from answering me by the sight of her brother, his arm about Nancy, leading her past the porch around to the back entrance of the house. To see them in this loving embrace when, after the report Eugene had received of his wife's frivolous behavior in his absence, he certainly ought to be very gravely displeased with her, was apparently disappointing and annoying to Mrs. Klam.

"Well!" she breathed with a sigh of sad resignation, "Nancy certainly does know how to throw dust in the men's eyes and twist them round her little finger! I feel I wouldn't be doing my dooty, Mr. Appleton, if I didn't warn you, a perfect stranger to my sister-in-law, not to leave yourself get taken in by her. I never so much blame a man for falling, as I blame a woman for tempting him."

"Scriptural authority for that," Elmer backed up his wife. "Garden of Eden. Eve tempted Adam."

"A man never gets fresh with a girl he respects," Mrs. Klam dogmatized. "If he takes liberties with a girl, it's because he knows he dares to. So I never pity a girl that falls. I always say 'twas two-thirds her own fault. She opened the way."

"You bet you! They lead a man on," said Elmer, knowingly.

"That your experience, Professor?" I asked.

"El don't speak from experience, but from observation," Mrs. Klam answered for him. "He sees, as every one else does, that a man's got to know pretty well what a girl *is*, before he'd have the nerve to play rough-house with her; pick her up and throw her over his shoulder and all like that! Now isn't that so, Mr. Appleton?"

"It didn't take *Nancy* long," Elmer spoke in before I could answer, "to leave you know you dared pick her up in your arms. Huh!" he grunted disapprovingly.

"She opened the way," Mrs. Klam firmly insisted; "calling you 'darling' right in front of us all!—and offering to tip you with a kiss! No, I don't blame you, Mr. Appleton!"

"You were led on," nodded Elmer.

"To prove it," added Mrs. Klam, "did you try to go that far with *me*? No, you did not!" she announced in a tone of Virtue Triumphant.

"No, I did not," I agreed, considering her thoughtfully. "But I really didn't mean to slight you, Mrs. Klam. Fact is I'm not husky enough. Some difference, you know, between a heavy weight like you and a fairy like Mrs. Eugene!"

"Yes, isn't she scrawny!" Mrs. Klam retorted. "But, Mr. Appleton," she shook her finger at me coquettishly, "you'd get something worse than a heavy-weight to carry

if you did try to toss *me* round, leave me tell you! You'd get your ears boxed, I'm afraid!"

"I'd just like to see any man try to get fresh like that with my wife! Not that I blame you, Mr. Appleton—as Lottie says, a man gener-ly knows *who* he can get funny with."

"A woman that a man *respects*, he don't pick up and throw over his shoulder," Mrs. Klam repeated herself, apparently admiring this dogma.

"Do you think, Mrs. Klam," I asked gravely, "that this conversation is good for Florence's clean little female mind to hear?"

"She don't understand. But if she did, she'd learn what her parents think of women that have so little *self-respect* as to leave men pick them up in their arms!"

"And," added Elmer, "her being so bold with you right out in front of all of us! Shameless, I call it, if you ast me! Offering to *kiss* you right there before the whole family! Eugene could har'ly believe it! He said it wasn't *like* her. I tol' him he didn't half know her! She's got him fooled! Offering to kiss a strange man yet in front of every one!"

"I agree with you, Professor, in preferring such offers to be made to me in strict privacy—alone in the dark. My tastes same as yours in that respect."

Elmer snorted a laugh that struck me as ribald and to my astonishment Mrs. Klam giggled.

"Oh, Mr. Appleton," she said, shaking with mirth, "you *are* full of your jokes, aren't you!"

"Up to the present moment, Mrs. Klam, I must confess my humor has not been appreciated. I've never been considered a funny man," I modestly admitted.

"Point is," said Elmer, assuming a judicial tone, "point

is, that Nancy, with all her hoydenish ideas of poppy-ritty—”

“Pro-piety, El,” Mrs. Klam corrected him.

“Ezactly—po-priety—point is that Brother-in-law Eugene is going to have a shamed face for his wife in his grand new position in Leitersville, the hoydenish way she carries on! *She* don’t know how ladies act in such wealthy, swell society as they’re got in Leitersville. She never met up with such folks as she’ll have to mix up with as Brother-in-law’s wife!”

“No, I’m sure our social menagerie at Leitersville will be a very new experience to her,” I agreed.

“Then of course I know you must feel, Mr. Appleton,” said Mrs. Klam, “what a pity it is that my brother married so much out of the sphere he’s raised himself to!”

“I do indeed,” I answered so heartily that she looked surprised, not expecting quite such an unqualified endorsement of her sentiments.

“I guess you know how you’d feel yourself in Brother’s place, if *your* wife made free and easy with other men and you holding such a fine public position!”

“Yes, and I’ve warned your brother, Mrs. Klam, that if he wants to *keep* his charming wife, he’ll have to get over his Pennsylvania Dutch ideas of a woman!”

The Klams both stared at me incredulously. “My brother,” answered Mrs. Klam stiffly, “has no ideas of women that are not to be deeply respected by all! You ought to see how the women feel that go to his lectures, Mr. Appleton!”

“I have seen them.”

“Then you know,” she triumphed, “how *women* think of him!”

“Yes, I know.”

“If Nancy would only leave me teach her, I could show

her just how to fill her difficult society position in Leitersville with *en-tire* satisfaction."

"I'm afraid it wouldn't be possible for a woman of Mrs. Eugene's culture and breeding to satisfy Leitersville's vulgar standards, Mrs. Klam."

She looked bewildered. "You're so *contrary* in your remarks, I can't tell what you do think! Do you call it 'breeding' to leave a man pick you up and throw you over his shoulder?"

I realized that if the woman rang that sentence on my ears once more, I'd be in danger of knocking her down and jumping on her!

"I'm sure, Mr. Appleton, you never saw a perfect lady leave a man pick—"

I rose and interrupted her. I spoke deliberately and brutally. "I'll tell you what I've never heard a 'perfect lady' do, Mrs. Klam; I've never heard her criticize, uncharitably and stupidly, her own brother's wife, if you'll excuse my bluntness!"

I felt that after that my departure from the porch was about due. So I took myself off.

CHAPTER XVII

THE contemplation of Eugene's humiliation at my presence in the bosom of his family, was so unpleasant to me that nothing would have induced me to subject myself and him to it but the compelling necessity (so I felt it) of protecting Nancy in a measure, not only from the hard conditions of her plight and from what seemed to me her almost pathological submission to her husband's idea of a wife, but also from the danger I sensed—and which no one in the family seemed to realize—of Yi's increasing despondency and fanaticism. The look I sometimes surprised in the young farmer's sad, cow-like eyes, made my flesh creep.

Eugene kept himself out of my way as much as possible, contriving to be late for most of his meals (disregarding the extra work this caused the women) promptly withdrawing from any association he did happen to be having with me upon our being joined by any of the family except Nancy; covering his sensitiveness under a grave dignity that I could see impressed and thrilled Nancy as being both fine and touching.

I wondered why, since he was so ashamed of his family, he was not proportionately proud of his wife; proud that one member of the household, though not of his blood, could at least speak grammatical English. But his attitude towards her continued to be that of a highly superior being with a secret grievance against an inferior.

To see her submitting day after day to the too heavy housework put upon her, tried me very much. Eugene, however, only when he saw her drudging, manifested some

mitigation of his sense of injury, though he himself never dreamed of drudging.

I often had a hard struggle to hold my tongue under the strain of his irritating habit of snubbing nearly everything his wife said and the equal strain of seeing her meekly tolerating it.

It was not a cheerful household! When once in a while Eugene did sit at meals with the rest of us, the suffering of his snobbish soul was very evident; and indeed sometimes the table talk was enough to move a heart harder than mine to some sympathy for the poor wretch.

One evening at supper when he happened to be with us Weesy and old Mrs. Curry gave us their ideas on "readin'" as a pastime.

"What yous *see* in it!" Mrs. Curry shook her head over the mystery. "*Me*, I couldn't set still and keep quiet long enough to read. It wonders me how you kin, Lypholate. Yes, and Nancy, too, and ah-ver boarder likewise."

"Well, me, if I do read," Weesy contributed, "no one darst talk! Not even come in the room and set. Everything's got to keep off! Or I don't get no sense of it."

"But do you git much sense of it even if every one does keep off?" inquired her mother-in-law skeptically.

"Well, if I oncet kin git *interested* in readin', I don't hear nothin' they say no more! It's gettin' *interested* oncet that's so hard. Unlest everything keeps off, I can't *get* *interested*. But oncet I'm *interested*, they kin talk about anything at all and I don't hear 'em no more!"

"Well, it would have to be awful interestin' readin' that would keep *me* from hearin' what they're sayin' in the room!" cried Mrs. Curry. "Well, I guess, then, anyhow!"

"Yes, well, before I'm interested oncet, if everything don't keep off, I can't git the sense of it."

Eugene, biting his lip, his eyes downcast, was, I saw, about to speak in to divert my attention from this vain repetition, when his brother Yi anticipated him.

"If you'd read your Bible, Weesy," he said somberly, "you'd get the sense of *it* all right. You'd see you was on your way to Perdition and draggin' your husband with!"

"Well," retorted Weesy sullenly, "I guess I ain't draggin' you to a much worse perdition that you've dragged me!—you with a groutch on all the time and never a jolly word fur a person!"

"Perdition ain't jolly! 'There shall be weepin' and gnashin' of teeth'!"

"Och, quit plaguin' yourself so about your salvation!"

"Yi gits it from his Pop, bein' sich a groutch," Mrs. Curry said in a tone of apology for her son. "Pop he was always sich a groutch too. Yi comes by it honest; he didn't steal it!"

"Yes, I know it comes a little natural to him to be ugly-dispositioned that way," admitted Weesy, "but I don't see how that helps *me* any—that it comes natural to him!"

Yi was sitting at one end of the table and I was sitting next to him on his left, at right angles to him. As I watched his face, the glitter in his eyes, his forehead growing blood red, the veins in his temples swelling like cords, I thought it advisable to try to change the subject. I turned to him and asked him a question. "By the way, Yi, is there a haberdasher in Virginsville?"—an unfortunate inquiry which only plunged us deeper into melancholy discussion.

"Whether there's a—haverdisher—or whatever? I

don't know what that is, right—a haverdisher. That there word ain't familiar with me. Does it *refer*," he inquired suspiciously, "to women or to whiskey?"

"It refers to neckties and stockings, Yi," Eugene explained with an embarrassed laugh.

"Better put your thotts on things that moth and rust cannot corrupt nor thieves break through and steal! *Neckties* is what yous think of—when hell's yawnin'!"

His voice was sepulchral, tragic. I marveled at the blindness of the family that they did not see whither he was tending.

Suddenly pushing back his plate, as though the sight of his food disgusted him, he rose, turned away from the table and strode out of the room.

"Yi has fell off his wittles from plaguin' hisself over you, Weesy," Mrs. Curry mourned. "He don't har'ly eat no more!"

"For all you *get* out of sticking to the world, the flesh and the devil, Weesy," said Nancy, "I should think you might as well give them up and have a little peace with Yi."

"I believe it would be a lot more cheerful 'round here if you did, Mrs. Weesy," I agreed. "Yi's making himself ill!"

"I ain't never wearin' myself plain!" said Weesy obstinately.

Eugene at this point made a determined move to divert my attention from the family—broaching a theme he well knew would catch me; something about the scandal of our still keeping our conscientious objectors in jail, when all the Allies had long ago freed theirs.

"The land of the free imposing twenty years sentences on men for their opinions!" I hotly answered, rising to his bait.

"The pacifist," said Eugene sententiously, "may be sneered at as a traitor to his country by him who, in hating his country's enemies, is a traitor to humanity, to brotherhood, to love!"

Said Nancy, "In fighting to save the world for ourselves, and not for our enemies as well, we fought for our own destruction!"

"Now you don't say so, my dear!" commented Eugene in the bored half-amused tone with which he always received her ideas.

Nancy colored sensitively, but persisted; "Since one can only fight with hate, but never against it, and can never fight with love but always against it, how can war be anything else than accursed?"

"Wisdom speaks!" murmured Eugene.

"Isn't it surprising, Mr. Appleton," Nancy, with heightened color, turned from him and spoke exclusively to me, "that with Hate always on the side of war and Love always on the side against war, Christians should wage wars, and even call them holy wars? Christians always call all their wars holy wars, don't they! Do you know—"

"There, there, my dear," Curry interrupted her, "hop up and get me some tea and don't try to talk of things beyond your depth!"

"How superior and patronizing we are!" I shrugged as Nancy, her eyes glistening (I couldn't tell whether with anger or tears) rose to wait upon her husband.

"Women do chatter so!" he said fretfully, though he flushed as sensitively under my irony as Nancy had under his.

"If all women would chatter as wisely against war, they might succeed in bringing about what statesmen, or rather

politicians, have failed to—a civilized and human way of settling disputes!”

“We’ll have wars as long as we have nations,” he said in his smooth, gliding, platform tone. “A national anthem can lure us to destruction as the Pied Piper lured the children to the mountain!”

“Wisdom speaks! Marvelous! That’s not a bit better, if as good, as the things Nan—Mrs. Curry said!”

“But, Appleton, women don’t think; they dress!”

“There’s nothing to prevent their doing both.”

“It’s a pity you’re not more popular in Leitersville, you’re such a champion of Nancy’s! She’ll need champions, I’m thinking, in the difficult rôle before her!”

“Other champions than yourself?”

“All she can get, poor child! But *your* championship, old man, wouldn’t be an asset; eh?”

“Do you know, to succeed in Leitersville doesn’t seem to me to be an achievement that would reflect great credit on any one.”

“Because you failed there, old man?”

“Because Leitersville failed *me*. Now if the town succeeded with *Nancy*—if it won her heart and her faith, that would be a feather in Leitersville’s cap!”

“I only hope she won’t be a flat failure there! I do wish,” he said petulantly, “that she were the kind to make them sit up and look!—with more dash and style than she’s got, poor girl!”

Nancy’s return with his tea checked the clever retort that rose to my lips and that I hated to waste.

I had been observing in the past week that Eugene, under any real or fancied neglect, on Nancy’s part, of what he considered her duty to him, would become very cold and distant towards her, subtly contriving somehow

to convey that, in view of that vaguely hinted sacrifice he had made of himself for her, he deemed a great deal due to him from her, and that under the circumstances she had no right to make any demands of her own. Even if I had not been aware of all the circumstances of his marriage, I would have sensed this mental attitude of his.

While he seemed to enjoy snubbing his wife, extracting therefrom a sense of power and superiority, yet when sometimes it would reduce Nancy to a prolonged silence, he would grow uneasy; for in the first place, he did not like it at all when she refrained from giving him any occasion for exercising his amiable art of sneering at her; and in the second, he was apparently not wholly indifferent to her attitude towards him; though he did not seem to mind wounding her, he did seem a bit afraid of her very rare indignation; and he simply could not stand it when she held herself off in a silent aloofness.

Sometimes, when he had been treating her more slightly than usual, I would deliberately engage her in talk which entirely excluded him; and sometimes, though not often, she would fall in with my purpose to punish him and play up to me. More often, however, she would defeat me by resolutely drawing him in, in spite of me. Usually that air of cold displeasure which he would assume when offended, would act as a lash to discipline her momentary revolt and quickly restore her sweet docility. But occasionally, when he had gone far enough in his contemptuous disrespect towards her to goad her to some resentment, she would, to my relief and to Eugene's chagrin, and even alarm, remain entirely indifferent to his displeasure. These rare occasions were, to me, very refreshing.

I wondered sometimes, these days, why I found myself

really wanting Nancy to get over her love for her husband; to lose her faith in his epigrams and in his air of spiritual uplift; to see him as I saw him.

"If her illusion made for her a fool's paradise, I'm not sure I'd want to see her enlightened, since the truth isn't always the most desirable thing to have, about those nearest to us. But she certainly is far from happy!"

The question was, would her love survive her inevitable realization, sooner or later, that Eugene was two-thirds humbug? And would this realization leave her bereft and broken-hearted, or happily released from a wretched bondage?

"Even if she's got to go through some suffering," I decided, "I'd rather see her work her way out of her infatuation than be submerged by it!"

However, I resolved to put a curb upon my very strong inclination to aid and abet the natural process of her disillusionment.

CHAPTER XVIII

FOR the most part, Eugene ignored his mother and brother and Weesy, scarcely ever addressing a remark to them. When he did, now and then, condescend from his height to speak to them, it was so manifestly for effect—to impress Nancy or me rather than to communicate with them, for he invariably talked above their heads—that I wondered whether they themselves, simple as they were, did not realize it.

"Hell has become obsolete, Yi," he told his brother one morning at breakfast in response to Weesy's complaints that she was all "wore out" because Yi had not "left" her close an eye all night long, "so afraid he has of going to Hell!"

"The only Hell Americans believe in any more, Yi," continued Eugene, "is the Hell of Not Succeeding; of not making money."

"See Carlyle's *Past and Present*," said Nancy.

Eugene squirmed at being caught and for once did not attempt to snub her comment.

"It need not matter to us, Yi," he went on resolutely, "whether there is a life beyond this. Our concern is to live each hour here like immortal beings! How can we hope for another life when we've failed to find in this one its immortal elements?"

"I go by Gawd's Word which says he that believeth not shall be damned," returned Yi miserably. "You're an onbeliever, *you* can't help me any!"

I was coming to feel an intolerable pity for Yi's sufferings. After breakfast that morning I tried to

talk to Eugene about it. But he was not interested.

"You heard him tell me I couldn't help him. I never could help any of my family except my sister Lottie. They are so far beneath me," he said bitterly, "that they can't hear the sound of my voice when I speak!"

It was that evening, when Yi did not come in at supper time, and Weesy, somewhat perturbed at such an unprecedented variance from custom, was about to go out to look for him, that something made me stop her.

"Let *me* go, Mrs. Curry! Eugene, will you come with me?"

Nancy, the first to realize what I apprehended, clutched her bosom. Weesy and Mrs. Curry stared at me dumbly. Eugene, looking vague, rose slowly from the table to follow me.

PART II

FROM NANCY'S POINT OF VIEW

PLATE II

VIEW OF THE EXCAVATION

PART II

FROM NANCY'S POINT OF VIEW

CHAPTER I

IT was a critical period in my life—a time of perplexity, consternation and confusion, of hurt and suffering—that Herrick Appleton amazingly turned up to become once more, after three years, my closest, kindest friend; my confidant as of old; in a sense my protector. That it was a propitious time for this to happen was so far from being apparent to me that I thought it at first a dire calamity. But how I would ever have lived through the sordid misery of that first summer after my marriage, without the solace of his companionship, his understanding and sympathy, I often wonder now. I think I would have gone under completely.

Greatly as my husband hated to have Herrick with us, he did not know the real menace that lurked for him in the presence of my old friend—the contrast daily before my eyes of the different breeding, the different standards of the two men—even though this did seem to me at the time merely superficial, due to Herrick's greater advantages in his youth. Indeed, I almost resented my friend's superiority over my husband in these matters. But before the summer was over, I began to realize, with an appalling despair, that this painful contrast presented by the two so near to me, far from being superficial, was only too evidently fundamental.

Of course I had always known that under Herrick's

cool reserve, under his rather irritably critical attitude towards people and his ruthlessness towards any one he suspected of posing, there was a fine sensitiveness, a capacity for very deep, warm feeling; but I had not known, before that ghastly summer evening when he and Eugene carried in poor Yi—his neck broken, his wrists slashed and ragged, a gruesome, hideous sight—how selfless Herrick could be; how profoundly he could be moved by another's troubles; how he could spend himself, body, brain and heart, for others.

As Yi's will left the farm to Weesy, his mother who from her childhood had worked like a dumb, driven brute, with scarcely a respite, was now left homeless and penniless. It was Herrick and I, rather than Eugene and Lottie, who seemed concerned as to what provision should be made for her.

"The natural thing, of course," I said when one evening about five days after the funeral, Eugene, Herrick and I were discussing the matter—sitting on the front porch after Mrs. Curry and Weesy had gone to bed—"would be for Lottie to take her mother to live with her."

"Lottie can't do that! You forget she's going to live in Leitersville!" Eugene promptly vetoed this suggestion.

"Is there a law against mothers and daughters living together in Leitersville?" asked Herrick.

"Lottie's ways and mother's are too different. Mother wouldn't be contented in Lottie's home."

"Then of course she must come to us," I said. "I think I can make her contented."

"That just shows," responded Eugene, his tone smooth and suave as always, but with a certain aloofness that I had learned to know as an expression of his displeasure with me, "how little idea you have, Nancy, of the social

position you'll be expected to fill in Leitersville! You couldn't keep mother shut up out of sight!"

"No, nor I shouldn't want to exactly!"

"If you don't try to learn something, I shall want to keep *you* out of sight!"

"But it's your mother, not me, we're concerned with now—what shall we do about her?" I anxiously asked.

"We'?" he repeated with a lift of his eyebrows that inquired why I meddled with what was none of my business.

"What shall you and Lottie do, then?"

"I think you can quite safely leave that question to us!"

"Perhaps," suggested Herrick, "Weesy will be glad to keep Mrs. Curry here with her?"

"No, her own mother and brother are coming here to live," I explained, "her brother to run the farm on shares."

"It's mother's own fault that she's in such a plight!" Eugene said fretfully. "She didn't consult Lottie or me when she deeded the farm to Yi. It was a most foolish thing to do!"

"But what else could she do," asked Herrick, "when she could not pay the interest on the mortgage (as she explained to me) which she had to put on the farm in order to send you to college?"

Eugene offered no reply to this. The momentary silence which followed was rather heavily expressive.

"By the way," I ventured, under cover of Herrick's presence, to ask a question which I would scarcely have dared to ask my husband if we had been alone, "what did you and Mr. Appleton tell me, Eugene, was to be your salary at the Academy?"

"None too much for our needs," he hastily replied, "considering that what I earn," he added ruefully, "is

all that will ever stand between us and want! If *you* had anything at all—or were even a good manager—like Lottie, for instance—but you're not, you know! If we're not very careful, *we* may find ourselves stranded as badly as mother has gotten herself through lack of foresight!"

"Yes," nodded Herrick, looking thoughtful, "if your mother had had foresight and prudence, she could live quite comfortably now on what she must have paid for your four years at Princeton, couldn't she? That investment does seem to have lacked foresight—from the point of view of her personal comfort."

"The matter seems to interest you, Appleton!"

"Rather more than it seems to interest you, Curry," Herrick smiled.

"I am not in the habit of airing the family finances to the general public!"

"We can hardly call Mr. Appleton the general public, dear," I said, "the way he has made our trouble his own!"

"I fully appreciate all you've done, Herrick, but there are still some privacies—"

He paused and frowned. Herrick said nothing.

"What *is* your salary to be, Eugene?" I deliberately repeated my question, though I knew how intensely it annoyed him.

"Why do you ask?" he coldly parried.

"Because we've got to decide what we can spare for your mother's support."

"Kindly leave that to me, Nancy!"

"But it's I that will have to do the managing and saving. So I've got to know. Tell me, Eugene."

"Can't we talk of something else than—" began Eugene, but Herrick spoke in.

"It's eight thousand dollars with house, coal and auto-

mobile thrown in—and about one thousand dollars more from your husband's very popular lectures."

Eugene flushed with annoyance as Herrick spoke. But he made no comment.

After a moment's awkward silence, I suggested that it would surely cause us no inconvenience whatever, with such an income as that, to pay back what Eugene owed his mother for his education.

"It's amusing," he smiled, "to hear you planning how *you're* going to dispose of my salary! Do you know, Appleton," he turned resolutely from the discussion of his mother's fate, "I'd like your advice on a question of policy—ethical policy, one might say—"

"It's quite good ethical policy, I think, to take care of one's mother!—if you'll forgive my impertinence, Curry!"

"Can we drop my strictly personal affairs for a moment? A question of policy at the Academy. I'm wondering how I shall deal with the Jewish problem—"

"You might take the Golden Rule as your guide."

"An awfully impracticable guide!" he sighed.

"Then be guided by your highest ideal of what education *is*; and what the work and influence of an educator should be."

"The work and influence of an educator who isn't judicious, is, as you know, apt to die a quick, unnatural death! Your own case!"

"But my work and influence are not dead merely because the Leitersville trustees won't let me teach in their little school, Curry!"

"You couldn't get a teaching job in any school or college in the land!"

So much the worse for the schools and colleges of the land! But I still teach."

"Ah, but we're not all writers with a reputation and an independent fortune."

"It's because so-called educators, these days, *are* 'judicious' (to the exclusion of everything that can really be called education) that in America to-day education is such a failure."

"Of course," Eugene admitted, "we could do much better work if we were not hampered."

"As for your Jewish question, if we ever want to grow up spiritually, we got to stop distinguishing between foreigners and compatriots; in so far as individuals or nations maintain barriers, they shut out life and love and peace and God!"

"Let me take that down!" said Eugene. "Get me a pencil, Nancy!" he added, after fumbling in vain in his pockets.

"Don't you dare to move Nan—Mrs. Curry! Get yourself a pencil!" Herrick roughly told him. "You'd better keep in practice a little in the way of manners to ladies! Leitersville will expect it of you, you know!"

Eugene looked surprised and quite boyishly indignant. "But to one's wife, in one's own home," he naïvely argued, "one is hardly expected to be formal and conventional!"

It was so obvious that he sincerely believed good manners to be in all cases (as in his own case) not an expression of the spirit, but a painfully acquired "guinea stamp," that Herrick and I both laughed involuntarily. I found myself, however, horribly startled to hear myself laughing at such a thing—the kind of thing that all during the long summer had been apt to affect me far otherwise than with amusement! That I *could* laugh—did it mark some change in me of which I had been unaware?—or—

But my wonder over myself was cut short by Eugene's really puzzled look at our amusement—followed by an offended expression that made me rather contrite.

It was after that night, however (which though I was not definitely conscious of it, must have marked a crisis in my inner life) that I found I no longer regretted, as I had at first, Herrick's living in Leitersville. On the contrary, I looked upon that fact as my most sustaining comfort; which indeed it proved to be. For through all my varied experiences—weird, humorous, grotesque, unhappy—in that little Pennsylvania Dutch city, there was always the consciousness in the background that Herrick's friendly understanding was there for me at my need.

CHAPTER II

IT was agreed, after some family discussion, that Mrs. Curry was to stay on with Weesy at the farm and that Lottie and Eugene would each pay a monthly sum for her board and other necessary expenses. I doubted whether either of them would live up to this agreement. If Eugene did not see the need of providing me, his wife, with money for her necessities, he would hardly be more generous to his mother; and as for Lottie, she no doubt felt in her heart that her brother, having much more income and fewer expenses than she, and being much more indebted to their mother, ought not to ask his sister to contribute from her narrow resources to what was clearly his obligation.

How I did want to put into Eugene's hands the money with which to buy a comfortable home for his mother! But I dared not. My heart knew no stronger desire at this time than to prove my husband's disinterested love; to test him out in our home life in Leitersville and see what, from his point of view, he would make of it; to give him every chance to come through as a man and a gentleman at least, if not as the god my heart had imagined him.

To carry out this test I must appear to submit to some things to which of course I had no idea of submitting permanently. Indeed, if I had been the dowerless wife Eugene supposed me to be, I think I would have been far less patient in adjusting our lives. For instance, in view of his strange aversion to letting me handle money, his seeming to be afraid to trust me with it, his preferring to take the time and trouble to pay all

the household bills himself rather than give me a dollar—his idea of a woman in relation to money being that of the usual Pennsylvania Dutchman who has not outgrown our late barbaric law which classed us with idiots, children and criminals—in view of the humiliation to which this attitude of his subjected me, I would certainly, had I been penniless, have insisted upon doing congenial work outside my home for a decent salary, rather than waste my youth in uncongenial work for no salary at all, not even a bit of pocket money. As it was, however, I would, for ends of my own, postpone for a time my revolt against the conditions imposed upon me.

The double-dealing to which I was compelled temporarily to resort, in my adjusting experiment, I would have found most distasteful had my purpose not made it seem justifiable; for it was, of course, for Eugene's sake as well as my own, it was to save our love and our life together, that I was scheming. My improvised illness of a whole week forced him to consent to the absolutely necessary servant that he had prohibited upon our starting our housekeeping. But what he took for a half grown girl at nominal wages was a young woman with bobbed hair and short skirts who, looking fourteen, was really twenty-eight, a thoroughly trained maid whom I had secured through a Philadelphia employment agency and who demanded just eight times the wages he grudgingly gave me for her each week—I of course secretly making up the deficit. Greatly as he enjoyed the dainty meals she cooked and childishly proud as he was of what he called the "swanky" service she gave us in the dining-room, his aversion to paying her small weekly fee was so much greater than his pleasure in her services, that as soon as I decided to be well enough to get out and about, he insisted upon her being discharged. I gave her pri-

vately a week's vacation with pay and after three days I had a relapse and went back to bed, determined not to arise therefrom until Eugene had learned how very much less expensive and more comfortable that supposedly cheap half-grown girl was than a neglected home and doctor's fees.

"Well, this *is* rather a shock—to find I have an invalid on my hands!" was his conjugal comment on the situation.

I fully realized, as I lay in bed in enforced idleness, that two months ago I would not have risked giving Eugene such cause for disappointment in me. I would have struggled to meet his expectations and to get along without the help he thought it weak and self-indulgent of me to require. But now, something seemed to have gone out of me; after the painful and fruitless toil of the long summer, I found myself amazingly indifferent to his opinion of me as a household drudge.

"You seem to me, Eugene," I told him, "rather inconsistent; you want a showy, stylish, fashionable wife who will impress Leitersville; and at the same time one who will do all her own housework when there's no financial necessity for it. Is such a combination ever found?"

"See how beautifully Lottie keeps house without any help—and society here is taking her up faster than it is you!"

I did not offer him the obvious explanation—that Lottie was more their kind.

Our home on the Academy campus was a large house with what I recognized as delightful possibilities. The trouble was it was furnished; and in Leitersville taste! I consulted Herrick as to whether I dared risk bringing in some of the rugs, furniture, silver and china from my own old home.

"Think what I could make of this house, Herrick! Can I risk it?"

"You'd give yourself away. The furnishings of Claxton Manor are so unique—they'd be exotic here. And I'm not sure the trustees wouldn't resent your setting aside this furniture that they've provided. 'Good enough for your predecessors, why not good enough for you? Giving yourself airs!'—that would be their attitude, I'm afraid. You might risk a few rugs and a little china and plate; furnish your own bed-room and an upstairs living room—the private part of the house that visitors don't see. But you will have to go carefully."

"I'd love to bring on the dining-room furniture; can't I?"

But this he vetoed as quite too risky.

I followed his advice, and Eugene proved gratifyingly appreciative of the two cozy, inviting rooms I arranged. Indeed, his astonishment at the quality of my things gave me some moments of apprehension for fear suspicion had been aroused in his mind.

"Some one in your family must have had some taste—and some money! Two big oriental rugs and all these little ones! And that silver service is stunningly effective! Why even the Leiters and Renzheimers haven't anything more spiffy. Why didn't you ever tell me you had these things? I never dreamed of it!"

"But when your mother asked about my *aus tire*, I did tell her that I had all the furnishings of my old home."

"But I supposed it was a lot of old junk one would expect to see in an Ohio country doctor's house! I never dreamed of such things as these! Your father must have had a mighty good practice! And yet," he

added ruefully, "he left you quite unprovided for! Recklessly extravagant, I suppose, buying things like these that only a millionaire would buy!"

I was glad he took it for granted that I had had all I owned sent on to me, and that he did not ask me any awkward questions. I did not care to do any more lying than was quite necessary.

"These two rooms certainly have an air!" he exulted over our re-furnished living room and bed-room. "But don't they make the rest of the house look rotten!"

He was so proud of our really beautiful living room that even quite formal visitors who came to see us when he was home, he insisted upon taking upstairs. There was something pathetic to me in this childish pleasure over a bit of "elegance," as he termed it. He had never had a real home before; a home that, from his standpoint, he need not feel ashamed of.

He conceded to me a meed of praise for my training of Addie, the maid whom he took for a child in her teens, and who, of course, had required no training, being a thoroughly experienced woman.

"I must say you've done well with that youngster! And in such a short space of time! I'm surprised that you *know* so much about social usages— But of course the women's domestic magazines these days—"

I glanced up smiling at the joke—and felt depressed at seeing that he meant it; believed I studied women's magazines to find out how to serve meals! Did he perhaps think me equally studious of works on etiquette?

One day after I had paid a visit to some of the Academy classes, I found myself fired with a desire to take the vacant position in the department of History and English. But when I begged Eugene to let me have it, although I could see that he would have liked very much

indeed to have had me earn the salary of the post, he firmly refused my beseeching.

"I'd be too much criticized for letting my wife work for money," he decided. "I know many married women are doing it, but Leitersville isn't up to that yet," he said regretfully.

"Leitersville is destined to get a few jolts one of these days," I prophesied.

"Not from you or me, I trust. It doesn't like to be jolted and is apt to ruin those who do the jolting. Look at Appleton!"

"Leitersville couldn't ruin Mr. Appleton!"

"Well, of course he's too big. But it could ruin you or me! And that reminds me to warn you again that here in Leitersville we can't be too intimate with Appleton. Moderately, of course. But I've my position to consider, you know."

"One has one's self-respect to consider, too, Eugene!"

"One need not lose one's self-respect because one acts with ordinary discretion, my dear. If Appleton had not been a journalist of note, a man of wealth and of well-known family (none of which things you and I are) Leitersville *would* have ruined him for all time!"

"'No real evil can befall you except what you yourself invite,'" I quoted. "See Lecture by Dr. Eugene Curry on *Heaven and Hell*. What was it you said?—'You hoist the flag in your own soul to summon love or hate, truth or falsehood, adventure or monotony, which only await your signal to throng upon you'—something like that you said, my dear—and I thought it fine! Well?"

But it never embarrassed Eugene to have me quote him against himself; on the contrary, my excellent memory for his beautiful epigrams always flattered and pleased

him. I had often noticed that when Herrick's occasionally caustic remarks would contain at one and the same time compliment and criticism, Eugene would always lap up the compliment and ignore the criticism.

He caught me to him just now as we stood before the open fire of our newly furnished living room, and kissed my cheek in expression of his appreciation of my quoting him so accurately.

"You *are* a sweet thing, you know! So sweet!" he murmured, his face buried against my neck. "So sweet!"

He could be a royal lover. Only a few months ago, when he had been to me a god all ivory and gold with no hint of clay, such caresses as these would have transported me to Elysium. But in discovering the feet of clay of my gold and ivory god, a certain quality in his kisses made me, to my secret distress, wince from them. To be sure, that same quality had, before our marriage, been present in all his love making, but I had not then understood it. It took marriage to teach me what I had never dreamed of—that to most men love means only passion. I had supposed passion was an expression and incident of love; not love itself. But now I was coming to feel that if my fair body were blighted, the far richer treasures I had to give—my tenderness, sympathy, understanding, devotion—would be meaningless; and this realization did miserably cheapen love for me and drag it down from the heights on which my imagination had enshrined it.

CHAPTER III

MEN can be so amazingly blind to what goes on under their very noses! Eugene actually supposed that my little servant and I together did all the work of our large house, including the washing, ironing, cleaning and cooking. He never dreamed that I employed a woman by the day to do most of the work of the house during his absence at the Academy, while Addie merely cooked, served, made the beds and dusted, I intelligently directing her and spending most of my time at the piano or at books or receiving visitors.

Of course I did not intend to keep up all this duplicity an hour longer than was necessary to what I conceived as my high purpose. As soon as that was accomplished—or had failed—I would openly live the life I thought right; not the sort I was living now—that of an idle parasite—but a life of congenial work that would justify my existence.

It was true, as Eugene had pointed out to me, that compared to Lottie's immediate success with a certain rather influential contingent of Leitersville, my own much simpler personality made slow headway.

One evening Herrick dropped in to bring me some books he wanted me to read, and as he and Eugene stood before me in the cozy sanctuary of our living room, a realization I had long been half consciously trying to avoid was forced upon me—I was coming to dislike seeing my husband and Herrick together; for several reasons; for my embarrassment at Herrick's uncanny penetration; for his merciless irony at poor Eugene's little weaknesses and

vanities of which, before our marriage, I had had no least inkling; for the fact that Herrick's thin, sharp face with its strong jaw and countenance of uncompromising honesty, in contrast with the gentle thoughtfulness and spirituality of Eugene's face, brought out a certain something in my husband's expression which I could not bear to see; a something sleek, secretive—

Eugene took the present occasion to mention complainingly that several "important" people who had promptly called on Lottie, had not as yet paid that attention to me; and Herrick, manifesting but slight interest in this fact that seemed so significant to Eugene, vouchsafed the opinion that Dorothy Renzheimer was at the bottom of it. "She's not got over her chagrin at your not marrying *her*!" he said bluntly.

"I don't think it's that at all," Eugene returned, embarrassed and rather flattered; he had quite ceased to feel Herrick's presence as a check upon personal privacies, after his six weeks at the farm and his intimate experiences with us over the tragedy of Yi's death. "It is because Nancy is so different from Lottie. Lottie has a lot of dignity; she has personality; and people see how admirably capable she is; and she has the knack of dressing in good style—you're too countrified, Nancy!" he said fretfully. "Can't you manage to get over it? You might try—for my sake!"

I avoided Herrick's eye. "Shall I take Lottie for my model, my dear?" I meekly asked. "She'd love me, you know, if I went to her and besought her, 'Teach me, sister, the ways of high society and I shall be so grateful! And what do you consider the very best way to keep cock roaches out of lard?' Lottie would be mine forever! The truth is, Eugene, if you didn't think it necessary to your work, I would feel it a dreadful waste of time

to get involved in Leitersville society. Devastating!"

"Lottie doesn't find it so. She thinks Leitersville society very superior to Columbia's."

"That's nice—for both Leitersville and Lottie. But I, you see, have lived in the country all my life and—"

"It's obvious—you don't have to proclaim it! But so did I until I went to college. You can overcome your disadvantages if you try. You don't," he surprisingly conceded, "have nearly so *many* to overcome as I had."

"And you," nodded Herrick appreciatively, "have entirely overcome all of yours! Great feat!"

I winced for my husband as I saw him flush slightly and dart a look of suspicion at Herrick who, I knew, was moved to say such things only because he so resented what he considered Eugene's lack of appreciation of me.

"Well, at least," retorted Eugene with dignity, "I've learned to feel at home in any society and I'm not merely tolerated, I'm sought after. If you'll just keep your eyes open, Nancy, and watch how some of the swells here dress and do things, the way *Lottie* takes them in, you can soon catch on to what is expected of you."

It was hard to keep my eyes from meeting Herrick's challenging twinkle!

"I'll try my best, dear, to emulate Leitersville's high class manners!" I replied.

"You've no room to be sarcastic and superior about it, you know! You've plenty to learn from Leitersville. Even from Lottie, if you weren't so absurdly self-satisfied; so unaware, my dear, of your own deficiencies!"

"Do you know," I said thoughtfully, "if Leitersville enthusiastically accepted me, I'd be alarmed about myself! I'd feel that something ought to be done about it and done quickly!"

"What reason you have for thinking yourself so awfully above the ordinary," Eugene shrugged, "I confess I fail to catch!"

"To be your wife is to be uncommon, Curry!" mocked that wretched Herrick.

"I don't mean," I explained, "that I'm not interested in Leitersville people. *Any* kind of people interests me. Lottie and Elmer interest me, and their immaculate child; and that bloodless, statistical lady with a reputation in Leitersville for profound learning, who told me in the course of one short call, how many men to a fraction were slain at Gettysburg, the exact conditions at the Battle of Bunker Hill (explaining at great length and with historic proof that it was really Breeds Hill) the dates at which our territories became states, the ways of alligators in their native habitat—she did, too, say 'native habitat,' " I anticipated a challenge as to this incredible conversational phrase.

"Mrs. Pepper!" Herrick chuckled. "She's getting ready for a trip to Europe next summer and is soliciting my help in 'studying up art'! My God, what she's cramming into herself about pictures! Her accumulation of facts would put to the blush the National Bureau of Statistics, if there is such a device. *She's* not going to be caught unprepared on European soil! From Paris she'll be writing letters to the *Leitersville Gazette*, as she did from California last year—giving the 'home folks' facts as to the city's area, population, height of buildings, number of churches, and so forth, as though Paris had been hitherto undiscovered by the world."

"She told me," I added, "how she's studying up, before she sails, 'the Dickens country, the Burns country, the Walter Scott country, the Luther country'—oh, Gawd, how ignorant she made me feel!"

"Don't be so *common!*" Eugene fairly shivered—and as I saw Herrick's quick, angry flush, I hastened to intercept his possibly caustic retort—

"Couldn't you, Mr. Appleton, when Mrs. Pepper comes to you for information about 'art,' try to humanize her?—help her to at least a *little* realization of Beauty in place of her appalling acquisition of Facts?—or isn't it worth the fearful effort?"

"I beg of you, Nancy, don't sneer at a fine woman like Mrs. Pepper!" Eugene coldly insisted. "She is one of the most respected ladies of Leitersville!"

"She's got them awed cold with her fund of beastly information," said Herrick. "Chautauqua stuff. She's always 'taking up courses.' It's not intellectual curiosity, it's a blind-as-a-bat ambition to 'improve her mind,' however painful the process. She ought to be decorated with a Green Cross of Knowledge!"

"You two are hyper-critical! Mrs. Pepper is a woman of position here, Nancy, that you want to cultivate."

"To have Facts and more Facts thrust down my throat faster than I can digest them?—when it's not facts that I hunger for. Even to save your position, dear Head Master, I refuse to be intimate with a Fact-Register. My Negro washwoman is more human and interesting!"

"Your Negro washwoman?" asked Eugene with a start of surprise.

"I was speaking rhetorically," I hastily explained, "meaning *any* Negro washwoman."

"All the same, Mrs. Pepper is a lady, Nancy," he repeated, "with whom you need to be friendly."

"A lady? Is she? She told me she'd 'sooner study up a subject than eat.' Creditable, perhaps, but hardly the style of 'a lady,' my love. Not that I'm avaricious for the

society of 'ladies'! The word is almost obsolete, isn't it? It's human beings one finds interesting, whether in a jail, a drawing-room or at the wash-tub—isn't it?"

"Sometimes I wonder, Curry, what in God's name you mean by a 'lady,' any way!" said Herrick.

"I thought I meant what any one else would mean!" retorted Eugene.

Again I threw myself into the breach. "I do insist, however, that Leitersville is very entertaining."

"Of course it is," assented Herrick. "A town where there was no one to make fun of would be too dull to live in!"

"But," I added plaintively, "I *would* like to draw the line at going to their parties! Must I really go to their parties, Eugene?"

"Yes, and do some entertaining yourself as well. When we've been to a few dinners and you've seen how they do it, *we* shall have to give a dinner. You two can imagine," Eugene suddenly relaxed and became confidential and surprisingly natural, "all I had to learn to get where I am! I was so much more unsophisticated than you are, my dear girl! My only asset was (if you'll let me say it) a winning personality; a thing I wasn't responsible for any way! But the things I didn't know! For instance, it was so amazing to me, when I first began to mingle with people, to hear how they chattered! I, an inarticulate country boy, who had lived always with people whose inner life was wholly unexpressed, I who had never even tried to tell any one what I thought or felt about anything at all, never dreamed that it could concern or interest any one but myself—to hear people discuss freely in public their thoughts and feelings—at a dinner party perhaps—I can look back and laugh at my own bewilderment over what seemed to

me the fevered madness of just ordinary conversation!"

"Most people," remarked Herrick, "instead of thinking more than they give out, talk a lot more than they think! You can have that one, Curry, if you think it good enough. It's a safe one, any way."

But Eugene's note book was not brought out. "I find," he said gloomily, "that so much caution in public speaking as my position makes necessary, not only clips the wings of oratory, but atrophies thought. Free thinking is the only possible thinking."

"Then surely the price you pay for your position is too heavy?" said Herrick interrogatively.

"It's easy for you to take that stand, Appleton—a man of means and a confirmed bachelor!"

"Not 'confirmed'! This cozy home of yours would excite envy in a much more confirmed bachelor than I am."

"Isn't it nice? Nancy does have a knack, doesn't she, in fixing up a house! If only she took an equal interest in making her social way—"

"She lacks one requisite," said Herrick in a tone of discouragement over me. "She hasn't a vulgar soul!"

"But when one lives in a world of vulgar souls!" Eugene shrugged. "One has got to be practical."

"Vulgar souls have got to," agreed Herrick.

"If you were a poor man and had to earn a living for a family, you'd *have* to change your attitude, Appleton—you'd have no choice. By the way, you did the Academy an ill turn when you took young Bradley, the Bishop's son, away with you."

"His leaving was wholly voluntary."

"But he followed you. I wonder whether I could get him back. He was an asset; a man of family and brains and character. Valuable and rare qualifications for a teacher of boys."

"But do you think it a good thing to expose boys to 'vulgar contacts'—I seem to remember your shuddering at my toleration of 'such a boorish clown'!"

"I've always suspected that you knew all along of Bradley's family connections!"

"You ought to know by this time that the family connections of people don't affect me—as they seem to affect you!" Herrick retorted—but instantly the expression of his face indicating his fear that in hitting at Eugene he might be hurting *me*, he changed his tone. "No, Curry, you can't get Bradley. He's studying Chemistry in Germany. He writes me of the huge laughter of German scholars over our naïve legislation against the teaching of Evolution!"

Eugene sighed. "We *are* still a bit barbaric and primitive!" he conceded.

CHAPTER IV

OFTEN during those first weeks of my social career at Leitersville, I would find Eugene regarding me with a puzzled speculation, and I learned that what perplexed him was the fact that not only was I never flustered by meeting people of presumably far wider worldly experience than I had ever enjoyed, but in one or two rather trying situations that arose, I displayed what he considered a *savoir-faire* which he could not reconcile with the things I so often said and did that in his opinion were "countrified," "common," "tactless," "too blunt"; he was also perplexed over the fact that while his sister Lottie, in spite of her vast self-esteem, lacked the social ease that in me so surprised him, and was frequently rather strained and excited when meeting the rich and great, and often did embarrassingly unsophisticated things, she was nevertheless a far greater success with Leitersville than I was. He explained my self-possession by deciding that I was too inexperienced to know what I *was* "up against."

One day when upon my meeting for the first time one of Leitersville's leading entertainers, the wife of a wealthy corporation lawyer, my composure, not to say phlegm, actually amused Eugene.

"You almost treated Mrs. Diener condescendingly!" he chuckled when she had gone.

"Oh, I hope not!" I said in quick genuine regret. "I do *try* to conceal my feelings!"

"You *feel* condescending towards a person like Mrs. Diener! Don't be absurd!"

"I'm afraid I *am* guilty of feeling just a little condescending towards a pretentious person who says 'Leave me outen the light,'—even if she is a Leitersville Leading Lady. To be sure, I object equally to Lottie's 'I'll extinguish it for you, Mrs. Diener!' Perhaps it is *pernicketty* to admit as my equals only those who speak of turning off the light. My village simplicity—"

"Why it is that you can't sense these social distinctions— You were more friendly with Mrs. Diener's social secretary than with Mrs. Diener herself! You're not stupid in other matters; why can't you use your intelligence in this business?"

"But I do. Mrs. Diener's social secretary is the only intelligent and interesting woman I've met in Leitersville!"

"She's not invited out at all and Mrs. Diener herself only has her on hand when she needs her assistance. If one of the waitresses at a party interested you, I suppose you'd sit down and chat with her!"

I did not tell him that Lottie had, to her consternation, once caught me doing practically that very thing in the dressing-room at the Country Club. I had found the maid in attendance, who was earning her way through a business college by working at parties, so very much more amusing and original than the rest of the party. "I didn't think you were *this* green!" Lottie had said to me disgustingly when she caught me.

For obvious reasons, I regretted that Lottie's house was just across the street from the Academy campus; she could so conveniently run in on me and discover the extra working woman I employed unknown to Eugene; find me criminally engaged in reading a novel while the beds were still unmade—Addie not getting 'round to bed-making until almost eleven o'clock; finding out, by stop-

ping in the kitchen to question Addie before she came up stairs to me, that we used what she considered an unnecessary amount of cream, butter and sugar for a family of three; and that I neglected to have the ceilings dusted (I'd as soon have thought of cleaning the sky!)

I misled her about the extra working woman by elaborately assuming that Eugene knew of her; though Lottie did think it quite incredible that her brother was willing to pay out so much money for housework.

"It is so unnecessary! What on earth do *you* do all day?"

"Not what you do—our tastes being widely different. Have some fudge? It's good. That's one thing I *can* cook—fudge. Fortunately. Eugene's extravagantly fond of it.

"If you can make good fudge you could learn to do *useful* cooking."

"Perhaps such learning would not be utterly beyond my mental capacity—but I shall most carefully avoid acquiring it. It comes in so handy, not knowing how to cook."

"How on earth do you mean, comes in handy *not* knowing how—you mean *knowing* how comes in—"

"No. I'd find it very inconvenient to know how to cook. For you see I prefer reading novels or going to movies or going joy riding with Mr. Appleton or—"

"How can you joke about such serious things as—"

"As cooking? Oh, I can joke about much more serious things than that! I could make some frightful jokes, for instance, about the new pastor of the Church on the Avenue, preaching his series of sermons against Catholics and Christian Science and Unitarians and Evolution, poor simp!"

"You're so slangy, Nancy! In Brother's position as

Head Master of the Academy, for his wife to be slangy! To call Reverend Kellog, the leading minister of the city, a 'poor simp'! *Do* be more careful!"

"Take some of this fudge home for Florence. Damned good fudge!"

"Oh!" gasped Lottie, and added firmly, when she had recovered, "No, Nancy, Florence is being punished and can have no candy for three days. I'm very sorry to say that Reverend Kellog's little daughter Mary led Florence into mischief!"

"I *thought* that child looked promising! She presented herself here one day and asked me whether Florence Crab lived here, and when I said no, she asked me where she did live; when I said I didn't know any such child, she remembered the name was Florence Lobster 'or *some* kind of a fish,' and then I saw she meant your Florence," I said, innocent of any uncomplimentary implication.

"The poor little motherless one," said Lottie, "is so untrained! Reverend Kellog does his best, but a man is so helpless! Still, I think he spoils Mary somewhat. He has not, to my knowledge, punished her at all for what they did yesterday—for which Florence, much less *deserving* of punishment, is undergoing three whole days deprived of playmates and candy."

"Perhaps Dr. Kellog feels that Mary should be rewarded rather than punished for so efficiently helping him in his work of saving souls!"

"What *do* you mean?" asked Lottie impatiently, "if you mean anything at all!"

"If Mary leads Florence into mischief, she may do more towards saving one soul than any of Dr. Kellog's silly attacks on other sects will do! What interesting mischief did she lead Florence into?"

"So 'interesting' as nearly to cause a riot in the town! Didn't you hear about it?"

"No. *What* was it?"

"Well, it seems that Mary got all stirred up by her father's sermon against Catholics, so she enticed Florence yesterday to the Roman Catholic Church and got her to help write on the door with chalk something perfectly dreadful and sign after it her father's name and her own and Florence's!"

"Oh! What did she write?"

Lottie whispered the awful words:—

"To hell with the Irish Catholics!

'Rev. J. W. Kellog and Mary.

'Florence Klam.'

The Catholics nearly mobbed Reverend Kellog!"

Lottie's look of genuine horror froze the laughter that rose to my lips.

"Your poor child must be greatly bewildered most of the time, Lottie, as to *what* she is being punished for!"

"She knows perfectly well. For giving Mary her chalk. Florence darsent give away her things. And for wandering away down to the Catholic Church when she darsent leave the block."

"Can't you see that it's Dr. Kellog that's to blame for inciting his daughter to hate and profanity? A most enterprising child she must be! It's Dr. Kellog that should be punished! I hope this thing is a lesson to him. But it won't be. He's too stupid!"

"He's a very excellent man!" Lottie primly defended the pastor of the rich and fashionable "Church on the Avenue," as it was called. "He's so considered by all!"

"To be so considered by Leitersville is enough to damn any minister!" I sighed. "The only genuine, fearless Christian minister they ever had here they drove out. He spoiled Big Business!"

"If you refer to Reverend Calloway, they say he did a lot of harm by stirring up unrest in the Church and town and getting people to think too much about things they'd better leave be. By the way, talking of Big Business," added Lottie, a look of complacency coming upon her countenance, "have Mrs. Renzheimer and her daughter Dorothy called on you yet?"

"They have not yet availed themselves of the privilege of knowing me," I answered, realizing from her expression that she herself had already been the happy recipient of this social recognition. "But if they are anything like the husband and father, Mr. George Renzheimer, who called here last night on some business he had with Eugene (he's an Academy trustee, you know) I marvel that even Leitersville can accept him socially, he is so uncouth."

"Now, Nancy, take a hint from me and don't give yourself away by criticizing every one that doesn't take you up. Any one can see it's just sour grapes. Mrs. Renzheimer and Miss Dorothy called on me and I found them *very* nice."

"My dear Lottie, one of your most engaging characteristics is that you find any one 'nice' that has a big income. Even I, if I acquired a fortune, would become rather 'nice'; now, wouldn't I?"

"You'd at least become a little justified in lolling 'round reading novels while Brother works to pay for all your housework!" she retorted rather cleverly, I thought.

"I hate idleness," I admitted, "but I prefer it to house-

work. However, I'm very soon going to get a job of some sort."

"Get a job! Brother's wife get a job! Gracious! Don't you think your job is seeing after your own home?"

"And yours, apparently," I smiled, "is seeing after me."

"I could help you so much if you'd *leave* me help you."

"But I haven't noticed your waiting until I let you."

"Now, for instance, the way you dress; Miss Dorothy Renzheimer was saying she thought you dress so odd!"

"Is she, then, as ungrammatical as her father? Tut, tut!"

"Indeed, she's *highly* educated. She attended a very expensive finishing school for two years. She thinks you ought to dress to conceal your thinness more. You are awfully thin, you know," said Lottie with a slight shudder.

"No wonder you and Miss Renzheimer shudder at the thought of all the dieting you'd have to do to attain *my* dainty figure!" I said sympathetically.

"I'm considered to have a *very* neat figure!" said Lottie indignantly.

But if I found Lottie's neighborliness annoying, Elmer's frank inquisitiveness and prying into our affairs were so blatant as to disturb even Eugene. Indeed, Elmer soon acquired a reputation in the neighborhood for being an impertinent busy-body and it was only the high esteem in which his wife and brother-in-law were held that saved him from being unmercifully snubbed for his freely offered advice, his openly telling people about it when he didn't approve of them, his tiresome boasting.

His wife, far from being embarrassed by these peculiarities, admired them. When he would relate with relish

to friends and neighbors his favorite anecdotes illustrative of Elmer Klam's independence of character, and other high qualities, she did not seem to realize that she was his only auditor who was appreciative and not bored.

"Now just to show you how I never knuckle down to anybody, no matter how high a person it is," he would say with his strutting cock-of-the-walk air, "here once when I was courting my wife, I took her for a buggy-ride to visit the Gettysburg battle field, and when we stopped on the top of the hill to take in the nice view, another carriage came up behind us and the driver yelled out, 'Will you drive to one side? You're obstructing the view for the President of the United States!' It was sure enough President McKinley in the buggy behind us! But do you suppose that made *me* any difference? *It did not!* I had as much right to the middle of the road and the front view as the President of the United States—or any Senator or Cabinet member or even any King had! For I was an American citizen! And one American citizen is the equal of any other American citizen whether President or music pefessor! And I *stood* on my rights. I called back, 'I have this place and I'm *keeping* this place! I've as much right to it as the President of the United States has!' And he hollered to me, 'But I tell you President McKinley is in this carriage!' 'I wouldn't care if George Washington was in that carriage!' I called back. 'McKinley's only an American citizen like all the rest of us, ain't he? *I don't move for any one!*' I hollered. And I don't either. I ain't that kind! An American is an American, I always say, and one American is as good as any other American! All born free and equal, a self-evident truth. I was raised in the public schools and I'm proud of it, for there I learned that in a democracy a free American citizen is any man's

equal whether he's a President or an Emperor or a Money-King or whatever! Well, that party in the back carriage he hollered and he bawled and he swore, but not an inch would I move *till I got good and ready!* Then, and not till then, I moved. That's the kind of a man I am. I always was and I always will be!"

"Yes, that's the way El is," Lottie would uphold and abet him. "He's awfully independent that way! *He'll* never step aside for any one else. He holds to his rights no matter who comes along. And he is not afraid to stand up and *say* so too, right in their face! He was always like that."

"Professor Klam gives me a pain!" I frequently overheard from an Academy pupil; and an occasional neighbor, forgetting our relationship, would groan in my presence, "That Professor Klam makes me tired, the way he hates himself!"

As a teacher of music at the Academy, Elmer was not inefficient, for the work was, of course, quite primary. But his pretensions to musicianship were so palpably ludicrous that even Leitersville repudiated them, the Thursday Music Club withholding from him any recognition and his utmost efforts failing to secure for him a church organ, in spite of the fact that for the honor and prestige of being the organist of "the Church of the Avenue," he offered to return his entire salary to the Church's charity fund. To his chagrin this munificent offer was respectfully declined. The only thing he managed to get was the directing of the music of the Baptist Sunday School. Inasmuch as the smaller town of Columbia had accepted him as a real musician, his Leitersville experience was very humiliating to him; but he vented his feelings by pitying a town that could so blindly miss its chance of something really good.

Naturally with two such relatives as Elmer and Lottie living across the street from me, I could not hope to keep my domestic arrangements concealed very long from Eugene.

CHAPTER V

IT was an unseasonably mild afternoon in the first week of October and I was sitting out under the big trees of the campus which sloped right down to the banks of the beautiful Conestoga Creek.

The book in my lap lay unheeded while I watched with dreamy, sleepy pleasure a half dozen very little boys diving from an island in the creek about a half mile out. They looked, from that distance, like Lilliputians a foot high, their naked white bodies gleaming in the sunlight like polished ivory—agile, graceful—darting in and out of the water like dazzling fishes. I envied them; and I pitied the Academy boys who, from the other end of the campus, were also enviously watching them; for “the observance of the Sabbath” was, by order of the trustees, and against Eugene’s judgment, strictly enforced at the Academy, and swimming to-day would have been a crime.

“They look like white sea gulls!” I thought happily, wishing that Herrick or Eugene or some one would come along to share my enjoyment of it.

And just then the new pastor of the Church on the Avenue, Dr. Kellog, approached me from across the lawn; a man in his prime, well-built, well-dressed, sleek, as spiritual and intelligent, apparently, as a prosperous undertaker. To me the only interesting thing about him was his highly original little daughter Mary who resembled him in nothing. But in my eagerness to share with some one my pleasure in the beauty of those sporting little boys in the distance, I welcomed him cordially, draw-

ing his attention at once, as he shook hands with me and sat down in the wicker chair beside me, to the scene before us.

"Did you ever see anything more graceful than the way they duck and dive? I've not been able to read a line, they fascinate me so!"

Dr. Kellog looked greatly astonished and glanced uneasily towards the groups of Academy boys about the grounds. "But—but, Mrs. Curry! I'm here to get your signature to a petition to the Mayor demanding the arrest of those boys who every Sabbath afternoon so outrage decency as to bathe in the creek without bathing suits—in a state of nudity!—right before the eyes of all the people who live along this creek!"

The back lawns of all the houses on "the Avenue," as the principal resident street of Leitersville was called, ran down to the creek.

"I have to make my daughter Mary keep to the front of the house on Sabbath afternoons," he gravely continued. "And your relatives the Klams, are obliged to keep their daughter Florence, also, from looking out the back windows. It is a serious nuisance and must be stopped!"

"But it's horrible to suggest such ideas to those two little girls!" I said indignantly. "If childhood can't remain uncorrupted—"

"Exactly! We *must* protect our children from corruption. I misunderstood you for a moment. Here's the petition to which we want your signature—" unfolding the paper he held, on which I saw a long list of names. "Will you sign just after Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Klam?"

"No, Dr. Kellog, I will not, though I'll gladly sign a petition that those very little boys be left unmolested

in their play! To arrest them would be criminal cruelty to babies—they're about seven or eight years old! They'd be frightened out of their senses!"

"But you just said—Mrs. Curry you surely don't uphold this indecency?"

"The indecency of this petition—no!"

"But—but I don't understand you! Do you think our young people can remain clean-minded and pure if we allow such a shameless exposure of nudity right out in the open?"

"'Ad imaginem Dei creavit illum!'" I quoted. "I think since the nudity is a half mile away our young people run a good chance of remaining clean-minded and pure if we don't suggest to them that God's image is too vile and corrupting to be looked upon with the naked eye!"

"We're not savages, Mrs. Curry!"

"No, we seem to have traveled far from the childlike innocence of savages, don't we? The sight of those children in their beauty and innocence, makes *me* want to worship their Creator!—and it seems to make you ashamed of your Creator, Dr. Kellog! You know, I don't often feel like worshiping the Creator of this cruel and rather frightful world! It may seem odd to you, dear Dr. Kellog, but your sermons against other sects don't make me feel nearly so religious as those nude boys make me feel—if you'll excuse me saying so!"

Dr. Kellog looked stern and troubled. "I'm very sorry to hear you talk like this, Mrs. Curry!"

"Not nearly so sorry, I'm sure, Dr. Kellog, as I am to find you wasting your time on that shameful petition!"

"But I really don't understand you! Shameful? Why?"

"Well, you know it was only after Adam and Eve had

sinned that they ran for fig leaves. And Swedenborg says, 'The angels in the highest heavens are in a state of nudity and know no shame.' To the pure—"

"Ah, but since we are a fallen race and not 'angels in the highest heaven,' nor yet the innocents our first parents were while in the Garden of Eden, that's the very reason, my dear Mrs. Curry, that we must cover our nakedness with fig leaves!" said the minister rhetorically and triumphantly.

"I should think you'd be afraid of starting that original small daughter of yours on a vice crusade!—when you think of her zealous effort to aid and abet you in your sectarian propaganda!"

He smiled. "She *is* an original child, isn't she? Gets it from her mother," he added in a tone of appropriate sadness for "the dear departed."

"Evidently!" was my mental (not spoken) comment.

"But it seems incredible to me, Mrs. Curry," he persisted, "that a lady of your evident intelligence and—and refinement, should so lack a sense of—well, propriety—as to refuse to sign this petition!"

"Sign that petition! I'd be ashamed to look in the mirror and meet my own eyes if my mind were so unclean that I could not see those children out there without thoughts of evil! Do you know what I think Americans will be doing next? They'll be prohibiting by law nude cows and horses and dogs to be seen in the open for fear the sight induces pruriency!"

The clerical gentleman rose. "Of course if that is how you feel," he said stiffly, "we cannot discuss the matter further. But I am surprised and hurt—and I must admit shocked, Mrs. Curry!"

He took his ceremoniously ministerial departure, leav-

ing me to return to my enjoyment of the little swimmers in the sunlight.

A few minutes later Eugene joined me, and so little impression had Dr. Kellog's call made upon me—except to fill me with wonder at the stupidity and mental impurity of some people—that, with unabated enthusiasm, I drew my husband's attention to the far-away island scene.

"Isn't it the most beautiful sight you ever beheld?"

"But you *are* so verdant, Nancy!" he complained, "to talk as you did to Dr. Kellog!"

"Why, how did you know?"

"He came to the house to get my signature."

"And how did *you* talk to him, my dear?"

"Not like 'an untutored savage'!"

"But of course you didn't sign?"

"But of course I did sign—as you must too. When you're in Rome— We can't impose our standards upon other people."

"Nor let them impose theirs on us, Eugene."

"We've got to be politic. You shocked Dr. Kellog!"

"Not nearly so much as he shocked me!"

"I wish you weren't so raw! You'll get me into trouble here with your village manners!—your lack of subtlety, of finesse. People of the world, Nancy, salve things over a bit, adapt themselves, compromise. They don't crudely plump down their ideas regardless of where or on whom they land!"

I did not answer at once. I had to wait until a painful little lump in my throat was safely swallowed. Then I quietly said, "You'll admit that Mr. Appleton is a man of the world and I don't see him salving things over and compromising."

"He doesn't have to."

"It's only the intellectually middle class that think they have to!" I retorted.

"You call me 'intellectually middle class'?" he inquired amused.

"Eugene, that you could stoop to sign that vulgar, silly petition rather fills me with disgust!"

"Indeed!" he sneered. "It's more to the point, however, that your not signing it annoys me excessively. I told Kellog you'd think better of it. You'll have to sign it."

"I wish you could see," I said sadly, "how you harm yourself by acting so often against your real convictions! If you go on this way, why, Eugene, my dear, you'll become an utter hypocrite! Even in a worldly sense, the juggler with his conscience usually ruins himself. He's always in the end repudiated and despised by the very society he has tried to propitiate! Look at Lloyd George and Woodrow Wilson!"

"Hear, hear! How wise we are!" he smiled mockingly. "I can take care of my own ethics, thank you! Understand, Nancy, you must sign that petition!"

I would not argue that point, though my silence meant that I certainly would not sign it. I smiled mournfully to myself as I thought how much more hypocritical my secret domestic régime would seem to Eugene than his own "tactful" descent to the level of the people he felt he had to please and satisfy. Well, I did not enjoy my hypocrisy. I loathed it. I could never have reconciled myself to doing, from motives of cowardice, what I was now doing from far other motives—the effort to bring into harmony two personalities that, I was beginning wretchedly to fear, were hopelessly mismatched.

"By the way, Eugene, you didn't give me Addie's wages yesterday," I said, my quiet tone concealing the quicker

beating of my heart in anticipation of his irritation at the reminder. I was obliged to go through the form of asking him for Addie's weekly wages to avert his wonder and suspicion as to why the girl stayed on without pay. It was requiring some stoicism to put through this experiment of mine. "Eugene, I would appreciate it so much if you didn't make me ask you for the money every week! It embarrasses me."

"It ought to! You are perfectly well now and are surely able to do as much work as that child can do. Lottie says she never sees you doing *any* housework!—that you lie 'round reading novels! It would be enough better for your health to take a broom and sweep!"

"But I'm so afraid that if some of the people you call 'important' found me sweeping, they might suspect that I came from a village! The 'important' people here all keep one or two maids. Some day, my dear, I'm going to have a butler. Oh yes, I am—you'll live to see it!"

"Visitors never catch Lottie sweeping; she manages too well. Look here, Nancy, I'm going to pay Addie off next Saturday and dismiss her. You're too self-indulgent for your own good!"

"I appreciate your thoughtfulness for my good, my dear, but if you dismiss Addie, I shall be obliged to scrub the front porch on my hands and knees before all the boys and in sight of the whole neighborhood—after which I shall certainly take to my bed until you get Addie back again."

He looked at me with an expression which, before our marriage, I had never once seen on his face—once would have been enough, I am sure, to have frightened me off. It was a cold, ugly look of mingled spite and dislike that somehow seemed to me to savor of effeminacy rather than virility. Of course I knew he did not dislike me

all the time; only now and then, when I became particularly irritating—he being unaware of the fact that the irritation was mutual; for thus far I had managed to conceal from him how often he jarred upon me; how he sometimes made my very soul shrink and curl up in its shell to hide its aversion. Even Herrick's keen penetration did not suspect me of these occasional secret revulsions.

"What right have you to refuse to do your part as a wife?" he coldly demanded, "seeing that you are wholly dependent upon your husband and have nothing of your own!"

"Nothing," I sighed, "but an old silver service, a few old rugs, and some old furniture—tut, tut, Nancy, couldn't you do better than that?" I said—wondering whether he suspected that even this little fraction of my possessions was worth what, by his standards, was a small fortune. And if he should know of my estate on the Hudson, the rent of which yielded me more than his yearly salary?—and of all my other sources of income! I was determined that he never should know until I was quite clear as to which he would value more—my possessions or me.

"If you ever lose your job, Eugene, the sale of my things would keep us going comfortably quite a while. And I've another asset—enough education to earn my own living—as I did for two years before my ambitious marriage; and, Eugene, you must admit that I make a comfortable home for you here."

"You do. But you could do it less extravagantly, my dear. When you consider the burden of expense I carry—with Mother to provide for—"

"Ten dollars a month! Which, Weesy complains, you don't *send*! Oh, Eugene! At least take care of your

mother ungrudgingly! Think of all she's done for you!"

"That's my affair—oblige me by keeping off of it, Nancy!"

"But you just said I should consider your expenses—the support of your mother. I'm considering too (since you're going to discharge Addie) *your* extravagance in engaging a secretary for your personal work in addition to the one the Academy gives you! My dear, that *is* a useless extravagance, a riot of self-indulgence! Oh, I have an idea! Let *me* be your personal secretary and I'll use the salary (it's seventy-five dollars a month, isn't it?) to pay Addie and your mother. Will you?"

"And have you prying into all my private affairs, dictating and advising—no, thank you, my dear!"

"Do you have secrets from me, my dear, that your personal secretary may know?"

"Even a married man likes his privacies."

"And a married woman too," I nodded. "I don't tell you everything either."

He laughed easily. "I know all about you that I want to know, my dear—and perhaps," he added ruefully, "some things I'd as lief not know!"

"Marriage *is* very illuminating," I said sweetly. "I've learned some things about you too, dear, since our marriage that I didn't know before."

He darted a swift, almost startled glance at me. He was realizing, to his evident discomfort, a new note in my attitude to him since we had left the farm and were established in our own home; a shade less of the docile submission with which I had endured the ordeal of the long summer.

"Is it the expense of your extra secretary that makes you unable to pay your mother and our maid?"

"Leave my mother out of it—that's not your affair,

Nancy! It's not only Addie's wages, it's her board. I happened to go through the kitchen when she was eating her lunch yesterday and the way she was spreading on the butter! At sixty-five cents a pound! All the food bills are nearly doubled when she is here."

"That's partly because she gives us more elaborate meals than the ready-cooked, canned things *I* serve you, dear."

"Why can't you learn to cook as she does?"

"For the same reason that you need an extra secretary. Come, dear, it's too lovely a day to argue and fuss! Let us be nice to each other! How about a walk up the creek?"

"Are you going to behave yourself about Dr. Kellog?"

"Sign his filthy petition? Of course not."

"Look, Nancy, it is advisable that you *should* sign it. I insist upon it. Or if that's too strong for you, I beg you to."

"That's better. But I can't, Eugene."

"You mean you won't?"

"I mean I can't."

"Come, come, don't be obstinate! I want you to, my dear."

"If I consented to put my name to a thing I consider imbecile and unclean, I would be worse than obstinate, I'd be a cad! Now please let us drop it!"

"Then I'm a cad, am I?"

"Did you consider the petition imbecile and unclean?"

"Imbecile of course. Well? Then I'm a cad?"

"What would *you* call yourself?"

"A man of common sense. A diplomat."

"Do you know," I laughed, "what Mencken says of American diplomacy?—that it is 'hypocritical, disingenuous, knavish and dishonorable'—and to this judg-

ment, he says, he makes 'no exception whatever, either recent or long past.' "

Eugene took out his note book. "In my lecture next week before the Civic Club on *American Ideals*, I could very aptly quote that—disapprovingly of course. Now, how does it go?"

When later in the day Dr. Kellog returned with his petition, and I, for the first time in my married life, refused to yield to my husband's wishes, coaxings and insistence, he, astonished, angry and offended, demonstrated his indignation in a form which he evidently considered the extreme of stringency—he left our bed-room that night and locked himself in the guest room across the hall.

I was lost in wonder at his delusion. "That he should consider that a punishment to me—*that!* Oh, God, how little he knows me!"

CHAPTER VI

IT was with mingled distress and rage that I witnessed, the next Sunday afternoon, six frightened, shivering little boys brought to shore by a policeman and marshaled to the Mayor's office or the police station—I did not know. "Pruriency triumphant over Innocence!" I later heard Herrick's sneering comment on the episode.

My experiences of life up to the time of my marriage had been limited to just two small areas—that of my old home where from childhood I had known toleration and encouragement of free discussion of every sort of opinion and (after one dead, empty year shut off from the world) my two years in the little Pennsylvania Dutch village of Virginsville where in Eugene's friendship I had again known a broad tolerance and entire freedom of thought and expression; so that I was not schooled in caution and secrecy as to my ideas and was entirely ignorant of the intolerance and narrowness that rules in small cities among the so-called educated. It was, therefore, inevitable that in spite of Eugene's warnings (which I did not take seriously) I should quite innocently and unconsciously expose myself to the criticisms and even condemnation of the people of Leitersville. And the amusing part of it (I never could take it tragically as Eugene did) was that during all the rising furor over me, my ideas, my habits, my clothes, the nude statuettes in my living room (Venus of Milo and the Apollo Belvedere) and finally my absolutely damning attitude as to the little nude bathers in our creek, I

remained entirely unaware of the fact that I was making any impression on any one and went right on in my reckless course, making it worse and worse all the time, smiling and pleased through it all, for I was finding Leitersville so interesting that I was beginning to feel I had found my vocation and could write a usefully amusing book about it.

"The only thing I lack," I told Herrick, "is technique and style and genius."

"Don't let such unimportant drawbacks discourage you. Do the best sellers usually display technique and style and genius?"

"But I want to write a best seller that has all that."

"A large order!"

"But Herrick, if I could just faithfully put down what I see here in Leitersville! Oh, gee!"

"Go to it, my dear, and see what you can do."

"We might write it together?"

"I couldn't write a novel without making you the heroine. You write the book and I'll criticize what you write. You can make me the hero and Eugene the villain."

Although for weeks after Dr. Kellog's Sunday afternoon visit to me, nearly every one who came to see me referred to the nude Sunday swimmers, it never occurred to me that these people, having heard of my refusal to sign the petition and some of my (greatly misconstrued) remarks thereon, were, as the Academy boys would have said, "trying to get a rise out of" me.

"Aren't you awfully relieved, Mrs. Curry, to have had that indecency stopped?" Mrs. Niedemyer asked me during an afternoon call.

"Oh, no, I enjoyed watching them."

"Enjoyed— Why, what a queer thing to *enjoy!*"

"Queer to enjoy the beauty and grace and innocence of children playing?"

"But for the morals of the neighborhood, Mrs. Curry, surely you think it was right to stop such—why, on account of your young maid, Addie,—she could see those naked boys from her kitchen window! Enough to make her turn *bad*!"

"But Addie isn't a degenerate, she's a perfectly decent girl. Don't you want to go this evening, Mrs. Niedemyer, to Mr. Appleton's Forum to hear his talk on Gandhi?"

"Candy? A humorous lecture it is?"

"Mahatma Gandhi."

"Dear me, what's that?"

"Another Christ, Mr. Herrick says."

Mrs. Niedemyer looked uncomfortable. "Has it anything to do with those bad boys? Mr. Appleton's such a queer man, you never know what he'll say next! I'd be nearly afraid to go to one of his lectures! I've heard him say things that made me feel that funny, I didn't know which way to look! Why, once didn't he tell me right out that his sister in New York was going to have a baby! I thought I'd die on the spot!"

"Heavens! *Why?*"

"Oh, Mrs. Curry, for a *man* to tell a lady such a thing! Why, my husband would no more— And they say no one attends those meetings at his house but a lot of laboring people, though he himself is such a gentleman! It seems so queer he'd want those kind of folks at his house! He's a very elegant man himself, I've always thought, except for his queer views and he won't join the Leitersville Men's Club, although invited, and it's not so easy to get into that club, you know! Dr. Curry belongs of course, don't he?"

"I don't know."

My not knowing a matter of such social significance was, I learned long afterwards, one of the proofs of my rural ignorance.

"My husband wouldn't leave me attend Mr. Appleton's Forum," Mrs. Niedemyer continued. "Mr. Appleton does have such queer opinions, doesn't he! They say," she added in a tone of awe, "that he's a *Bolshevist*! Yes, Mrs. Curry, I heard that for a fact! Such queer views for a *gentleman* to have!"

"But his views aren't 'queer,' Mrs. Niedemyer; they're only the views of the world's leading thinkers!"

"Oh, but they say the leading thinkers often have very queer ideas indeed! Look at the queer ideas Darwin had! Did you say, Mrs. Curry, you *liked* watching those—those naked boys?" she asked, lowering her voice and looking puzzled.

"Loved to. Gandhi is such a great celebrity, Mrs. Niedemyer, that you'd better take advantage of learning all about him at Mr. Appleton's Forum."

"But I'd be afraid to risk it! I'd be afraid of the queer things Mr. Appleton might say; things, you know, that might not be very refined. I'd just die if he said such things when I was sitting there! Didn't you *mind* having that young maid of yours, Mrs. Curry, watch those boys all stripped?"

"Why should I? She's twenty-eight years old, a perfectly self-reliant young woman that would rightly resent my concerning myself with her morality—which is *her* affair. Have you," I quickly asked to divert her from this nauseating theme, "read *Babbitt*?"

"No, but I heard Mrs. Peffer say she hated to think of the time wasted that it took to read that book, where she *could* have used that time for reading a book that

was instructive or that uplifted you or that had some pretty characters. She says that book hasn't one fine character!"

"It hasn't one single poor one! The character sketching is marvelous!"

"But she meant no lovable characters that you could take as a model."

"No," I grinned, "Mr. Lewis doesn't make characters *for* us, but of us!"

"Well, for my part, I must say I like an uplifting book. Or what's the use of it? Why, Mrs. Curry, some of the popular new novels, the leading characters aren't even refined!"

"Are life and nature 'refined'?"

"Oh, well, but that's different!"

Another day I had a visitor, Mrs. Bergstresser, who opened up the delectable subject of the nude boys by drawing my attention to my lower moral standard as compared to my sister-in-law's.

"You and your sister-in-law don't resemble each other, do you?"

"It's a way with sisters-in-law, not to resemble each other, don't you think?"

"Yes, isn't that the truth! And you are certainly different from Mrs. Klam!"

"Thank you—I mean, do you think so? I'm afraid you flatter me. Have a chocolate?" I held out a bon-bon dish from the tea table.

My serving tea to callers was, by the way, Lottie had told me, considered ultra-stylish on the part of one who in other respects fell below standard as to what was deemed in Leitersville to be real elegance. For instance, I was sometimes so silent in company as to seem really shy; at a neighborhood thimble tea I hemmed

kitchen towels while the other ladies embroidered fine doilies or did something they called "drawn work" to exquisite lingerie; I had been known to rest my elbow on the table at a luncheon; I had no "jolly give and take in social conversation," but was often, in the midst of the liveliest fun, as serious as a country Mennonite. And I didn't even know whether or not my husband belonged to the exclusive Leitersville Men's Club!

"You see," continued Mrs. Bergstresser, "Mrs. Klam is so—well, so particular!"

"About many things," I nodded over my tea cup. "About mice and cockroaches and dust on the ceiling and Florence's clean little mind and garbage and her brother's wife's morals and manners!—I should say she is particular!"

"And you're so—well, not lax exactly, but easy-going, aren't you! Mrs. Klam was so particular to keep her little Florence from seeing those bad, nasty boys that went swimming all undressed over at the island!"

A feeling of despair came upon me. I wondered how Leitersville would occupy itself once it had exhausted this salacious topic! I little dreamed that it never would exhaust it; that the juicy kernel of interest in it was my connection with it and my supposedly ribald comments about it; and that twelve years hence they would still be discussing it with all the relish it had for them to-day and with amazingly embellished versions of my "views" about "nudity."

"If you had a little daughter of your own, Mrs. Curry," persisted Mrs. Bergstresser as she sipped her tea, "wouldn't *you* protect her from looking at such things?"

"I'd certainly try to protect her from hearing prurient suggestions about human nakedness! Have you

heard of little Mary Kellog's latest adventure?" I patiently tried to change the wearisome subject. "Her revenge upon Mrs. Klam because Florence was not allowed to play with her for three days on account of their writing on the Roman Catholic Church door? Mary knew that Mrs. Klam was giving a card party last night, so she escaped from the Manse, went down to the Square where the Salvation Army were playing a drum and a tambourine and singing hymns, and induced the leader to take his Army up to the Klams where, she told him, some *very* wicked people were 'carousing' and gambling with cards! So for nearly an hour the card party was treated to a deafening uproar of drum, tambourine and shrill singing of hymns and loud praying for the lost souls given over to the lust of the flesh and the pride of the eye—and it was too warm to close the windows!"

Mrs. Bergstresser informed me she had been at the party and knew all about the commotion, but she had *not* been aware of the distressing and disgraceful fact that the minister's child was responsible! Her horror was not assumed.

"Mrs. Klam had to 'phone to the police station and have them ordered away!" she told me. "Really, Dr. Kellog ought to do something about that child! If only," Mrs. Bergstresser sighed, "poor little Mary had a mother like Mrs. Klam, what a different child she'd be!"

"Very," I readily admitted. "And what a dull place Leitersville would then be without the thrilling suspense we're always in as to what Mary will be up to next! Mary's pranks and nude swimming children seem to be all that keep us alive!"

Even my neighbor across the street from the Academy, Mrs. Diffenderfer, whose sole topic of conversation I

had thus far found to be Food, was diverted long enough from the discussion of apple dumplings, noodle soup, waffles, clam chowder, to ask me, "*Would* you think it was all right, Mrs. Curry, to leave the Academy boys go swimming in the creek right here without bathing suits on?"

"I've no authority over the boys, you know. Won't you let my cook have your recipe for that lovely pumpkin pie you sent me last week, Mrs. Diffenderfer?"

"Did you like it? Well, you take and beat four eggs—"

I kept an attentive gaze fixed on her throughout her long spiel about pumpkin pie, the while I wasn't hearing a word of it, the subject, though not touching my life at any point, being a welcome diversion, because pumpkin pies were not nude boys, so I strenuously pretended to listen, though I didn't like her pumpkin pies anyway; they were tame and uninteresting after the highly spiced ones Addie made with rich, flaky crust and vitalized with brandy from my father's old wine cellar, a few bottles of which had been sent on with my furniture.

"What a menagerie this town is!" I thought, as Mrs. Diffenderfer wandered on from pumpkin pie to mince pie and from thence to clam chowder and vegetable soup.

"My husband just loves my vegetable soup. Whenever I don't know what to have any more, Hen'll say, 'Oh, well, Mamma, leave us have some of your vegetable soup.' So then I take and order a bone and with the stock I've boiled off from time to time, don't you know—I'm very saving with left-over meat and bones and always make stock of— But my son, Hen junior, prefers waffles. He'll say, 'You can give me waffles, Mother, any old time and I won't kick!' My waffles are wonderfully

light that way, if I do say it! You see there's so much in the mixing. Now I take and mix my butter and milk first, you see; it's a great mistake to—"

Mrs. Diffenderfer's telephone and mine were on the same line and it seemed to me that I never took down the receiver without catching her in the act of telling some friend or neighbor what she was having for lunch or dinner and how she "took and mixed it." "I'm having chicken corn soup for lunch to-day; Hen always says if I'll just give him some of my chicken corn soup—" "Well, I thought I'd just take and have apple dumplings to-day, Hen's so fond of my—" "Oh, this morning Hen junior said he wanted me to have flannel cakes for—"

Even Eugene, whenever he encountered this neighbor of ours, whether on the trolley car, on the side walk, or in society, was not spared by virtue of the dignity of his office, or his personal dignity, or his reputed spirituality of mind, from harangues on Food.

"She actually told me to-day," he would report to me, "that she was giving Hen pot roast for dinner, flavored with carrots and tomatoes!"

"Yes, you may think it bad enough to have her tell you her bill of fare, but suppose," I said ruefully, "you had to pretend to be interested while she minutely recited her recipes! 'You take and mix a quart of salt to a pinch of vinegar, then stir in a peck of lard and beat up your pepper very light—'"

It really made me melancholy to learn that this supremely important matter of meals could mean dire tragedy to the poor woman—which was made manifest when one Sunday morning, looking quite wild, she told me of the rise and fall and ultimate ruin of her breakfast waffles through the negligence of her maid. 'Even after

I took and mixed them up and got the waffle iron at just the right heat, didn't she up and— You see, we always have waffles for breakfast on Sabbath morning. No matter whether we have company or not, *waffles* are our Sabbath morning breakfast. And have been ever since we were married sixteen years ago. Never missed them on one single Sabbath morning! And then to have this dumb dopper up and— Well, I'll tell you what I did—I just got up from the breakfast table and I said to Hen and Hen junior, I said, 'Before I'll leave you miss your Sabbath morning waffles, I'll go out and mix up some fresh batter and *I'll* bake them for you!' And I did. Hen and Hen junior sat and waited while I did it. I just couldn't bear it to have them not have their Sabbath morning waffles. I'd never have gotten over it!"

"Give me waffles or give me death!" I cried when she had left Eugene and me after this recital of the tragic violation of the sanctity of her "Sabbath" breakfast.

There was one other trifling episode which brought upon me, all unconsciously, the judgment and condemnation of Leitersville's "best society." It occurred at a large dinner where I happened to sit next to Dr. Warren, a rising young nerve specialist from Philadelphia, who engaged me in an interesting discussion in which he claimed that the modern neurotic woman owed her sick nerves to her selfish and unnatural refusal to bear children.

"The race can't be allowed to die out!" he affirmed dogmatically.

"Oh, why not? When you *look* at it! At the ruling and leading specimens, for instance—the Big Four at Versailles and Tom Mix and Billy Sunday and the Ku Klux Klan—"

We became so earnest that we attracted attention to

ourselves and a silence fell upon the table which suddenly brought us up short.

"What's the interesting discussion?" asked the hostess, Miss Eichler, a straight-laced Presbyterian of the old school who admired her pastor, Dr. Kellog, as much as she disapproved of his daughter Mary. As she was rich enough to tempt a man who, saddled with a wild Indian like Mary, could not expect to win youth and beauty, and as Dr. Kellog was known to spend most of his spare time in this austere lady's company, I trembled for Mary and speculated in private as to how I might, in case Miss Eichler became her step-mother, kidnap the poor child and hide her where her father could not find her. I was sure he would be grateful to me. "May we all have the benefit of the absorbing conversation?" inquired Miss Eichler. "What is it about, if one may ask?"

"Certainly," I agreed, smilingly taking in the whole table. "We're discussing birth control."

The ghastly silence that followed my simple statement did not enlighten me as to the shock I had given them, for the reason that I really was young and inexperienced and their kind of squeamishness was so behind the times, as I knew the times through reading and through the free life of my old home.

Miss Eichler, after an awful instant, very pointedly projected a topic of quite another nature. "Dr. Kellog has just been telling me how encouraged he feels to find quite a revival in the Church these days of the old-fashioned type of experimental piety."

The irrelevancy of this bewildered me at first; then, as the new subject was at once taken up with almost feverish eagerness, I felt amused at the flightiness of so abrupt a transition.

Of course if Eugene had been present, I would have learned from him, on our return home, with bitter reproaches, what a *faux pas* I had made, but he was in New York on business. So it was not until many months afterwards that I heard how I had that night added another dark splotch to the unenviable notoriety I had acquired through my views on the nude swimmers.

It must have been about this time that murmurings began to spread as to the richness of some of my clothing, the simplicity of which had been, at first, I suppose, misleading as to its quality. It began with Mrs. Niedemyer's noticing in the crown of my very plain hat the name of an exclusive little New York shop that seemed to amaze her; she handled the hat reverently.

Then there was my mink coat. It was of course generally known that before my marriage I had been a village school teacher and as it was manifest that a Head Master's salary could not buy mink coats, how had I come by the one I flaunted?

When Lottie ventured to ask me, I told her truthfully that the coat had been my mother's.

Some of my acquaintances questioned me quite frankly about my apparel. "Is that pretty gown you have on one of your trousseau, Mrs. Curry?" Mrs. Feltenberger inquired about a fur-trimmed suit I wore to a card party.

"But I didn't have any trousseau, seeing I was married on my death-bed!" I smiled.

"But you didn't get this gown in Leitersville surely?"

I shook my head as I sorted my cards, wondering how far she would go.

"I was sure you could not have bought it here—it's too unusual. Looks imported. It would not pay our shops to carry such things—not enough people could afford to buy them, you know. Most of our people who

wear such stunning things, get them in Philadelphia. Do you shop in Philadelphia, Mrs. Curry?"

"No."

"In New York?"

"Sometimes. It's your turn to bid, Mrs. Neidemyer."

Eugene who had never as yet offered me a dollar for clothes, assumed that the few new gowns in which I appeared were paid for with my savings from teaching. But even he could not long remain so deluded, I knew.

Meantime, Leitersville society was beginning to put two and two together and make them equal ten. They summed me up:—loose views as to human nudity, as to servants' morals, as to certain books dealing too openly with the sex question—combined with a style of dress deceitfully simple and plain to mislead an unsuspecting husband as to its outrageous costliness; young, pretty, reckless—what was the obvious conclusion?

But although I was quite humbly conscious of my failure to take Leitersville by storm or even to win the mere liking of most of the people I met, and though I would have felt rather flattered if I had known that far from being the negligible person I considered myself, I was really the sensation of the town,—nevertheless, there were moments in which I did wonder whether there were not something all wrong with me when I found myself so completely out of sympathy with and really antagonistic towards some things which the people about me thought wholly commendable. For instance, when the secretary of the Civic Club publicly read a grateful letter from the indigent widowed mother of the girl whom the Club was helping to educate by supporting her while she went through the High School, I winced miserably from the abject gratitude of the woman. I felt (perhaps quite wrongly) that she owed more resentment than

thanks to these smug, comfortable women who patronized her in her poverty and humiliation and then flaunted before the whole town her acceptance of alms, a monthly stipend for the girl's board and clothing. I felt a blind fury at hearing the complacent secretary say from the platform, in a self-consciously charitable tone of voice, "The mother, Mrs. Dietz, seems to be *very* appreciative of all we've tried to do; and the daughter, Sarah, is very worthy"—when any member of that club would have preferred death to the shame of being exposed to an audience as a recipient of charity. And yet how evidently these women admired their own "charity" in helping this girl!

"We're not charitable enough to forego the luxury of practicing charity," I thought, "and to substitute social justice for it."

But why did I alone, of all the women in the club, feel cold towards this "sweet charity"? Could it be that I alone was right and all of them in the wrong?

"But how remarkably thoughtful above the average I must be then!" in self-derision I told myself. "Surely something must be the matter with *me*, not with all these others!"

However, I remembered Job's unshaken faith in God's goodness in spite of all the evils which God heaped upon him; I would be no less faithful to the God in my own heart, to my own inner conviction that so-called "charity" was in a large part a self-indulgence of the rich and smug.

I was sure that, for the sake of a more just social order, I would gladly forego the special advantages I had always enjoyed from my own considerable wealth; but so long as we lived in a society where there *were* upper and lower dogs, I certainly didn't propose to be-

come a lower dog if I could help it. It was not that I did not value comfort and even luxury for myself; I wanted them for everybody.

There was a Mrs. Frey in the club who at nearly every meeting, no matter what was being discussed, managed to work in a certain phrase she had acquired which she evidently loved and cherished:—"I always feel," she would say impressively, "that no civilization can be higher than the status of its women,"—and from this premise she would deduce, to her own satisfaction and that of her hearers, the unavoidable conclusion that American women, being the free, fine, and truly feminine goddesses of liberty which the whole world knew they *were*, it followed that in the United States was the highest, most Christian civilization the world had ever known.

But I remembered that there were those who told us that Chicago was the most barbarous city in the world and I had not heard that the status of its women was that of "benighted heathen lands."

When the club launched a campaign for funds to establish American Christian colleges for women in eastern countries, I did have sense enough not to rise in the meeting and give utterance to my conviction that while it might be well to try to advance the education of women in eastern countries, it seemed a useless expense if that education were to be the American Christian brand that produced the women of this Civic Club, drugged by self-satisfaction into a blindness to reality.

These, then, were the people of whose judgment of me my husband was nervously apprehensive, lest they find me "green and raw." I would have been conceited enough to have considered him rather undiscerning if I had not realized, from my summer on the farm, how cir-

cumscribed were his standards of comparison and how very far he was from suspecting that to the wife for whose manners and gentility he was so uneasy, he seemed himself embarrassingly unsophisticated.

However, although I was at the time unaware of it, his apprehensions of my social failure in Leitersville were being realized beyond his darkest fears.

Of course the reason I remained so long unconscious of the sensation I was creating was that the members of one's family are always the last to hear gossip about one; and as for Herrick, he did not go into society, his associates being mostly the laboring people of Leitersville with whom he was trying out an experiment in classes in history, economics, the science of government—with an open forum held at his own house, since Jacob Leiter, the town boss, and his "gang," as Herrick called them, would not permit an open forum in any public hall of the town.

In spite however, of his social isolation, Herrick did not miss some of the universal excitement over me.

"Do you know, Nancy, my dear, that every one in Leitersville seems to be in a high state of turmoil over your refusal to sign that damned petition of Dr. Kellog's?"

"Oh, not really?" I said incredulously and quite indifferently, for if people could be as silly as that, its only effect on me was to make me feel a little sorry for them.

"Yes," nodded Herrick, "you've shaken the Respectability here to its foundations!"

"Who told you that?"

"Dorothy Renzheimer, who professes herself profoundly shocked. I told her I was glad to hear that there was *one* woman in the town too clean-minded to sign that nasty paper! But she told me in a horrified whisper that

you could not possibly be 'clean-minded,' for she'd heard you read Oscar Wilde's Plays! 'So do I,' I told her, 'and I'd supposed that all educated people did.' I sent her home rather discomfited."

I laughed—and never thought of the matter again. That is, not until ten or twelve years later, when to my astonishment and amusement, I learned from an old Leitersville acquaintance that the town had never stopped discussing this thing; that every new-comer to the town, whether visitor or resident, was told of it; that it had become a Leitersville tradition.

"They say you approved of nudity in public!—that you told Mrs. Niedmeyer you liked to look at men walking on the bank of the creek without bathing suits on; that you told Mrs. Peffer you didn't care anything about the morals of your servants—all you cared about was that they did your work; that you said to Mrs. Bergstresser you considered it narrow minded to cover the body except for warmth; that you said to Miss Eichler you didn't see why Greek art was immoral just because it wasn't Christian—"

CHAPTER VII

"I'M obliged to go to New York to-night—will you pack my bag, dear?" Eugene casually threw out one evening in December as we were having our after dinner coffee in the living room. This was the fourth time since September that he had, in this off-hand way, announced a departure for New York just at the moment of leaving, and, somehow, it had at each time come to me as a slight shock for which I was not prepared; partly because it seemed a bit inconsiderate, if not really unkind, to tell me so abruptly that I was to be left alone for a week or ten days in our big house; and partly because I really did feel rather abandoned and desolate when he was away, since I had no real friend except Herrick in the town and he, unconventional though he was, always refused absolutely to come to see me in Eugene's absence or to let me go to see him.

"It would give Leitersville too good a chance, my dear. And it *would* be playing with fire. For me, I mean. You're a very alluring young person, you know, Nancy, and I'm not by nature a monk exactly!"

"If you and I, Herrick, can't safely enjoy an evening together with talk and books and music—"

He shook his head. "You're much too kissable. And once I'd kissed you—the fires of hell would break loose!"

"'Fires of hell!' Gracious!"

"You don't begin to know me!" he said gloomily. The glitter in his eyes, the tense look about his lips, startled and, I must admit, thrilled me. The danger signs were

so unmistakable that I could not question his wisdom in refusing to comfort my loneliness.

To Eugene, just now, I said rather listlessly, "How long shall you be gone?"

"Until I'm ready to come back, my dear," he retorted; nothing irritated him like a direct personal question and he never volunteered any information as to why he went or when he would come home. Nor did he ever, on his return, tell me anything about his trip. If I asked I was snubbed. Sometimes an occasional visitor's questions in my presence after one of his absences would bring out the fact that he had stopped at a luxurious hotel, seen some good plays, met some distinguished "educators" (as they are called).

"It's lonely for me here, Eugene, when you are away. Take me with you! It's such ages since I've seen New York!"

"I didn't know you'd ever seen it."

"Yes—I've seen it. Will you take me with you, dear?"

"Not possible. Going on business."

"Why need that prevent your taking me with you?"

"Why such useless expense?"

"To give me pleasure."

"You do nothing but amuse yourself from morning to night! Refuse to do your own housework and then expect me to take you on expensive trips! What next!"

"I don't live in idleness from choice. I want to teach."

"That being impracticable, the fact remains that you do live in idleness."

"The truth is, Eugene, I'm doing a lot of reading and studying to prepare myself for some really congenial work."

"Your work is here in our home."

I pondered in silence the fact that he regarded me (not without some justification) a parasite, consuming his earnings without giving him what he considered an adequate return. How this would have wounded both my pride and my love a few months ago! But now it did not interfere at all with the carrying out of my experiment, the cold-blooded and almost impersonal testing of my situation and of my relation to him.

"Then you won't take me to New York with you?" I was not too proud to plead.

"Why Nancy, the car-fare alone, round trip, is fourteen dollars. And hotel rates are frightful."

"You are going on Academy business?"

"Whether I am or not, my dear, is my affair!"

"Don't forget to leave me some money," I said in a matter-of-course tone, as though he were in the habit (which he was not) of leaving me money when he went away.

"What for?"

"A stamp! Or I may need a tooth pick!"

"You don't need any money, since you charge everything you have to buy and can get your stationery at the Academy office. What do you want money for?"

But as he spoke he drew out his purse and handed me two dollars.

"Addie's last week's pay," I said. "Now some for me."

"I told you I'd give you no more money for Addie. I told you to dismiss her. If she stays on, you can tell her she'll be working for her board and room. She'll get no more wages from me."

"What is this two dollars for?"

"For you in my absence; though I don't see what you need any ready money for."

I considered the advisability of tossing the two dollar bill into the open fire before which we sat. But that would not be carrying out my rôle.

"I wish," he said, "you'd try to keep down the grocer's and butcher's bills; they're surely unnecessarily large. My absence ought to make an appreciable difference in their bills this month.

"Then you are going to be away some time?"

"Uncertain."

"It is very lonely for me."

"If you did your own housework as you should, my dear, you would not have time to be lonesome."

"What will your address be?"

He had the grace to hesitate before naming the very expensive hotel at which I knew he usually stopped, though when he wrote to me, he used picture post cards and not his hotel paper. "I've got to maintain a certain standard as Head Master when I'm interviewing parents of pupils," he explained rather apologetically.

He would come back from New York with a new assortment of high quality ties, hose, shoes, gloves, shirts. His clothes were always topnotch in style and material and he had the proper outfits for every possible occasion. Yet he never thought it necessary to offer me any money for clothing, pocket money, or any personal need. And now this two dollar bill for which I had begged! An awful dreariness swept over me as I saw, in a momentary flash, the beautiful image of the god-like man I had married.

"I'll tell you what you might do in my absence, Nancy," he suddenly suggested. "Run out to Virginsville and visit Mother and Weesy at the farm. I'll give you the car-fare and you'll be saving your board here, you know."

"I'm to visit at the farm while you're staying at the Vanderbilt in New York?" I asked in a tone of impersonal curiosity as one might investigate a phenomenon.

"I'm going on business, not pleasure."

"But you'll have a devilish good time!"

"Why shouldn't I? I don't account for my actions to you, my dear. Understand that!"

"But you expect me to economize and pinch while you indulge yourself."

"I earn the money, don't I? I couldn't endure the grind of the school if I didn't have *some* recreation. What's more, the people I meet, the plays I see, the lectures and music I hear are all experiences I need for my work, for my lectures. Run out to the country. It will do you good."

He rose, patted my shoulder and went into our bedroom to prepare for his journey.

I dutifully followed to pack his bag.

CHAPTER VIII

THE intimacy that sprang up between the two scape goats of the town, the Reverend Dr. Kellog's irrepressible Mary and myself, was another favorite topic of gossip. Mary, on a very slight acquaintance with me, having found that, unlike most of her father's church members, I was not only quite uncritical of her way of life but rather sympathetic with it, and as hungry to mother her as she was to be mothered, promptly adopted me as her "very dearest friend," as she informed me, disregarding the disparity in our ages; and in a remarkably short space of time we had come to be quite necessary to each other.

Lottie amiably told me that some of the Presbyterian Church members didn't think my influence on Mary was for the best and that some of them had gone so far as to warn Dr. Kellog that he ought not to allow his child to be with me so constantly.

But I suppose Dr. Kellog must have decided that, dangerous though I might possibly be, Mary's adventurous spirit was safer in my house than when at large on her own resources, for he not only did not interfere, but seemed grateful to me for my motherly interest in Mary.

One of her recent ideas had broken up a Wednesday evening prayer meeting. When a kneeling Elder was leading in prayer with tightly closed eyes and head tilted back at a painful angle, Mary, concluding that he was talking in his sleep, took from her pocket a big marble and shot it across the floor at his knee to awaken him,

eliciting from him a howl of pain that startled, frightened and eventually broke up the meeting.

"Do you know Mrs. Curry," she asked me one day, "that Mrs. Feltenberger that lives on Second street is the Virgin Mary?"

"No, that's something I didn't know. How does it happen?"

"Lucy Hess told me Mrs. Feltenberger was God's mother. She said 'Come on down with me to see my god's mother.' "

"Her god-mother!" I smiled, and explained to Mary her mistake.

"What's a virgin, Mrs. Curry?"

"An unmarried woman or girl."

"But the Virgin Mary was married to Joseph!"

"Not when Jesus was born."

"Oh, gee, wasn't that an awful disgrace to her? When Mame Zigler that lives in the alley behind the Manse had a baby, I took Florence Klam in to see it and Mr. and Mrs. Klam nearly swoon'd with h'ahr! Because they said it was a terrible disgrace to Mame Zigler because she wasn't married to a husband, and they said Florence would certainly be roon'd if she played with me!" repeated Mary with quite impersonal and detached interest in the Klams' opinion of her effect on their daughter. "No wonder Daddy preaches against Roman Catholics for worshipping the Virgin Mary if she was a *bad* woman like Mame Zigler!"

"She wasn't, my dear. She was a very good woman."

"Then isn't Mame Zigler bad either?"

"I don't know your friend Mame Zigler."

"But you know she had a baby without being married to a husband. Mr. and Mrs. Klam said so. And they said that was somepin *awful*! They said I mustn't go

near her or speak to her! Don't *you* think it's wicked to have a baby without being married to a husband?"

"It's against the law."

"Then did the Virgin Mary break the law?"

"Ask your father to explain it to you, Mary."

"No, he'll be shawked. He's always shawked when I talk to him about religion. And sometimes he punishes me for being ig-rev'rent. So *you* tell me, Mrs. Curry."

I had to be very diplomatic in my refusal to assume any such responsibility, lest I rouse the child's dangerously and quite insatiable curiosity. "I'll have to look it up in the Encyclopedia or something—don't you want to go over and get Florence to come and play with you?"

"I'd rather play with you—just we two by ourselves."

"Poor little Florence!" I sighed, for I foresaw that child's doom from overrearing. Given no least chance for free and natural development, she was being made unfit for association with her kind.

"You can't have any fun with a person that isn't allowed to get dirty," Mary pointed out to me. "Florence doesn't even *want* to get dirty. She don't like me to come near her if I'm not perfectly clean. And I hardly ever am. She called to me when I passed her house to-day, 'Mary, you go home and get washed all nice and clean and then come and play with me, *will* you, Mary?' And I called back, 'I'm clean enough to suit myself and it's my own concerns!' And she said, 'Are you going to my Aunt Nancy's?' And I said, 'Yes, and my Aunt Nancy is going to take me out in her automobile.'"

"Am I, Mary? I didn't know that."

"Will you,—Aunt Nancy?"

Up to this moment she had always called me "Mrs. Curry."

She *was* a responsibility. Sometimes I was at my wits'

end to know how to deal with her, though if she had been my own child, the puzzle would have been simpler.

One day, with a gleam in her eyes as of one who had come to a momentous decision, she said to me, "Aunt Nancy, did you ever read that e'citing pome about the boy that stood on the burning deck?"

"Yes."

"It just goes to show, doesn't it, Aunt Nancy, that *that's* what comes of obedience to parents! I never did quite believe in obedience to parents myself, Aunt Nancy, and now that I know it can lead to a child's burning to death, I'm never going to uphold to it again," she announced.

"Oh, yes, you are, Mary dear, because you don't want to worry and hurt your father who loves you and is very kind to you," I said piously.

"Well, anyway, Aunt Nancy, I won't obey him like that boy did—against my better judgment, Aunt Nancy."

The Presbyterian Sunday School superintendent inquired one Sunday of his assembled school, who would volunteer to write a letter to the little daughter of the missionary they were supporting in Dakota and Mary was of course the first to rise and announce her willingness to adventure. When her letter was written, she, exultant over a task well done, proudly submitted it to me for my admiration. I wondered a bit at her not showing it to her father rather than to me. But he, unfortunate man, had never known how to win her confidence.

The letter greatly astonished me because it was so wholly unlike Mary, so unnatural as coming from her; until I suddenly realized that the child's highly dramatic instinct had produced the sort of letter that she con-

ceived the pious superintendent and his overpious women assistants to expect her to write; a letter that reflected, as Mary believed, that Sunday School superintendent's idea of "a Christian child."

"MY DEAR ROWENA,

"I hope some day you will be able to come to see our church on Children's Day. It is so pretty. Miss Gable, our dear superintendent which died not long ago, trimmed up the room other years, so we thought we would fix it that way this year so that she would have a part in it. Miss Gable was superintendent for forty-five years and now she is with her Maker. We all hope you may have a nice Sunday School and we will send money to our missionary to make a nice one, so you can go there and learn more of our dear Jesus Christ who died to save us. I hope our dear Lord will bless you and your friends and we all will pray for you and your friends. I prayed for you in Sunday School to-day after I heard of you and your little friends. I would be so glad to receive a letter from you telling me all about where you live and your friends. It would be so interesting. I would love to see you and your friends at our Sunday School some day. My address is on the first page.

"MARY KELLOG."

She was so beamingly proud of this composition that I had a struggle to hide from her my amusement over it.

I wondered what Rowena's mother would think of a child of seven that would write a letter like that. Would the woman believe in its genuineness?

"She'll probably think Mary the most horrible little prig!—when she's really an artist!"

When in two weeks an answer came, the very first letter Mary had ever received in her life, she was wild with delight and excitement; for Rowena, the missionary's daughter, wrote a perfectly natural and spontaneous letter, without a word of pious cant, telling very entertainingly of her school, her brothers and sisters, her friends, her parents. The picture she made fired Mary's imagination to fever heat. Her reply went back that same day, a radiant outpouring about things that interested her (in which category her "Aunt Nancy" figured rather large) every gay and bubbling line betraying her relief at not being obliged to keep up the religious farce.

For several years after that these two children who had never seen each other kept up this correspondence with unabated zeal.

Mary was the only child in whom I had ever known Eugene to be the least interested. One of the disappointments, not to say shocks, of my marriage had been the discovery that my husband did not care for children; for I had always disliked men for whom children had no appeal. Eugene never noticed them. But his attention had been drawn to Mary one day in the fall when, in passing the Manse, he had seen her in the garden at the side of the house, kneeling beside a flower-bed where she had evidently been digging and planting; she seemed to be praying audibly, for her hands were piously clasped and she was talking aloud. Pausing in surprise to listen, he heard her say, "Now, God, this garden is going well. So don't you interfere and make it rain and hail and spoil all my work! For Jesus' sake, Amen."

His next encounter with her was one day when he met her and Florence Klam going to school, and as he

stopped for a moment to speak to his little niece, Mary talked in and told him eagerly, "What do you think we're going to see in our school this afternoon, Uncle Eugene?" (promptly adopting Florence's relative without a "By your leave?") "We're going to see some of the real water of Niagara Falls! Sally Weitzel's going to bring a pitcher full of it to school for us to see!"

But a few hours later, when school was "out," she called on him at his Academy office to explain, in drooping dejection and disappointment, that she had misunderstood Sally Weitzel who had told them that morning at school that she had "a pitcher of Niagara Falls" which she would bring to school and it was only a picture post card!

In spite of the fact that Lottie sedulously shielded Florence from too much of my undesirable influence, she was, nevertheless, very jealous of our fondness for Mary Kellog and our having her with us so much.

Lottie was a constant source of wonder to me; her combination of hardness towards her old mother and ruthlessness in disciplining her only child, together with a maudlin sentimentality that called children "wee folks" and talked publicly of a mother's love, a wife's "lawlty," a Christian's "juty," seemed to me inexplicable. She would proudly relate things about herself that made me so ashamed of her that I suffered.

"When I was preparing supper yesterday," she recounted at a card party where I happened to be at the same table with her, "Florence committed some misdemeanor for which I told her that as soon as supper was over I would have to chastise her. Well, when her Papa came in, she sobbingly told him that Mamma had said she would have to chastise her. Now El does hate to have her chastised, so he did a really unwise thing, though he

did not realize until later what a predicament he was putting me in! He said to Florence, 'Well, well, now, Florence, we'll kneel right down here in the kitchen and pray to Gawd that Mamma *won't* chastise you.' So they knelt down and first he prayed that Mamma would soften her heart and forgive and then he made Florence pray. Now you see what a problem that gave me to solve! I *always* keep my word to Florence. If I say I'll chastise her I never fail to do it. But how could I do a thing that might weaken her faith in prayer? That *was* a problem, wasn't it? What was I to *do*?"

This fine point was eagerly taken up and discussed with keen interest by all the women at our table except me, every one of them contributing an opinion on the subject, or an anecdote apropos of faith in prayer, or of keeping your word to "little ones."

My silence in the midst of their chatter becoming conspicuous, they turned upon me to demand almost aggressively, how I would have "solved such a problem." They loved so to mouth that word "problem," I think they thought it savored of culture.

"You see," I replied, "such a 'problem' couldn't exist for me because I'd never teach a child such superstition about prayer and God and if I couldn't guide my own little girl without beating her, I'd give up and let her take her *own* way to the devil, rather than send her there by making her afraid and resentful!"

I was not pleased with this speech. I knew it was tactless and even reckless. But these women sometimes roused in me an irrepressible perversity.

Of course all they got out of it was that I had said I would let my child go to the devil.

I never did learn how Lottie had solved her "problem"; for the consternation with which my remarks were met

was so depressing and the comments they elicited so bromidic, that suddenly I felt I could stand no more, and on the plea of a headache I excused myself and went home.

Lottie came over the next day at an hour when she knew Eugene would be at home—just when we were finishing luncheon—and pointed out to me in his presence how I was injuring her dear brother by my “scandalous remarks.”

“What was it you really did say, Nancy?” Eugene inquired anxiously. “Of course, Lottie, she did not say what you’ve just repeated—that’s nonsense! Well?” he demanded of me.

“I don’t remember exactly. It wasn’t worth remembering.”

“But it will *be* remembered by all those folks that heard you, Nancy!” complained Lottie.

“Hereafter when I’ve got to let off steam, I’ll clothe it in language they can’t misconstrue. When they appealed to me yesterday for my opinion of Lottie’s ‘problem’ I should safely have quoted Josiah Royce—‘My dear ladies, we must first think the Family in order to know the individual— Here, as elsewhere, the universal is *prius* to the particular— In the same fashion, the true Infinite is not the negation of the Finite, but that which is the organic unity of the Infinite and Finite. Yet the universal must not be conceived—”

“That’s not Royce, it’s Caird,” put in Eugene learnedly.

“I read something like it in Royce—he quotes Caird.”

“You can’t deny, Nancy,” resumed Lottie, “that you said you’d leave your own child go to the devil and wouldn’t teach her to pray to Gawd and—”

"If I can't bring up my own child the way I please," I began—

"But you use such tough words, like 'go to the devil,' and 'hell' and even 'damn' sometimes!—right out before folks! I do think—"

She gave vent, here, to what were evidently long pent-up grievances, pouring forth such a flood of criticism of my strictly personal and private affairs, interspersing it with so much free advice and so much sympathy for her poor, long-suffering, martyred brother as she contrasted her own wisdom with my folly, her own high qualities of character with my pitiable infirmities, that suddenly the worm turned and I gave her a small dose of her own medicine. Assuming a tone of kindly condescension, as of one speaking from a great moral height to a lowly sinner, I said to her, "Don't you know, my poor, dear woman, that self-praise is always a very suspicious sign?—that virtues of which you are proud and self-conscious, are not really your own, but a mere veneer? Only the goodness that you take for granted and are *not* conscious of, is real and inherent goodness. If you pride yourself on your honesty, you're probably at heart a thief. If you're proud of being chaste, you are probably at heart a libertine!"

But Lottie stared at me uncomprehendingly. "I don't know what you're talking about! You must be crazy! Me a 'libertine'! My goodness! Do *you* know what she's talking about, Eugene? Do tell her, Brother, that she must try for your sake to talk more refined and not use—"

Eugene, looking very bored, would nevertheless have risen to his sister's expectations, for he turned to me with a look of irritation and was about to speak—when I decided to prevent his admonishing me in his sister's presence by abruptly leaving the room.

CHAPTER IX

EUGENE was forming a habit of going out and leaving me alone every evening on which we did not have a social engagement together. Where he spent at least four evenings a week apart from me I had no idea, since he deeply resented the bare suggestion of any obligation on his part to inform me of his doings; not, of course, because he was doing anything he was ashamed to tell me, for the Head Master of a school has to be as circumspect and correct as the pastor of a church, but solely because of his touchy fear of my encroaching upon his right to complete personal liberty and all the privacy as to his own affairs that he saw fit to keep. I respected his right to such liberty and privacy, but I did wonder why he should be so elaborately secretive as to where he spent his evenings and whether he would be quite complacent under a similar attitude on my side. I was so curious as to this latter question that I determined to put it to a test, so one evening as he was lounging on the big couch before the living room fire, reading the evening paper, and would, I knew, get up in a few minutes to go out, I went to our bed-room, put on my dressiest evening wrap, and then strolled into the living room, drawing on a pair of long white gloves.

"Ah?" he said in surprise as he glanced up from his paper, "Whither away?"

"Are you going out this evening?" I asked.

"Presently, yes."

"'Whither away?'"

"That's my affair."

"Good-night," I said strolling on towards the door.

"But where are you going?" he threw after me over his shoulder.

"That's my affair."

He rose, his newspaper in his hand, strode across the floor and faced me. "What are you up to, Nancy? Where are you going?"

It was sheer curiosity that prompted him.

"As it happens," I ventured experimentally, "I'm going where you are going."

To my surprise he looked distinctly startled. "But—but I am going—you can't be," he said in a tone of uncertainty and with a troubled look that made him appear actually guilty.

"If I 'can't be,'—well, then, I suppose that's *not* where I'm going," I smiled.

"Why don't you tell me?" he asked coldly.

"Where did you say *you* were going, dear?"

He looked at me narrowly. "I get you!" he shrugged with a bored lifting of his eyebrows. "Come here, foolish child!"

But I was not going to be fondled and cajoled into an admission. "Haven't time," I said, walking on to the doorway, from where I threw him a kiss, then hurried downstairs.

"Nancy!" he called from the top of the stairs—but my answer was the closing of the front door.

I stood on the doorstep and wondered where I should go. There were only two possible places, a moving picture or Herrick's.

Eugene had no idea how many afternoons and evenings Herrick and I spent together. Not that we were sur-

reptitious about it; I only followed his own tactics and did not mention my personal doings.

When at eleven o'clock that night I returned home, I was surprised to see Eugene's hat, overcoat, and gloves on the hall couch. He seldom got back before midnight.

On my way upstairs, I saw that our bed-room was dark. So he had already gone to bed and was asleep. I decided not to disturb him. I would sleep in the guest room.

Evidently, however, he had not been asleep and had been listening for me, for while I was undressing in the guest room, he came to me.

"What are you doing in here, my dear?" he asked in a tone of quite unwonted hesitation.

"I didn't want to disturb you."

"I wasn't asleep. Naturally, I could not sleep while you were out!—Come, my love!"

Next morning at breakfast, he asked me casually, while glancing over his mail, "By the way, where were you last night, dearest?"

"By the way, where were you, darling?"

"Here at home!"

So I had startled him into spending an evening at home! "And I," I told him, "had an engagement with Her—Mr. Appleton."

The flash of green-eyed jealousy he darted at me across the table made me wonder why, if he cared for my faithful love, he did not take more pains to guard it?

I was a little surprised that he made no comment on my information; did not repeat his frequent warning against a noticeable intimacy between our household and one who was so unfavorably regarded in Leitersville as was Herrick—Eugene's idea being that we must not cut him altogether, not only because of his great kindness

and helpfulness to us last summer, but because his distinguished associations and acquaintances in a larger world than Leitersville might some day prove useful to us.

That night Eugene again decided to stay at home. I did my best to compensate him for any self-denial he might be exercising, by being as amiably companionable as possible and we were really having rather a pleasant time together, when about nine o'clock the telephone bell rang. As it was on the table just at my elbow, I picked it up to respond, but Eugene, springing to my side, took it from me. "Probably for me," he hastily explained.

I was impressed, as he talked, by the guarded tone in his voice, a touch of nervousness, almost of apprehension. When he hung up the receiver, his face was flushed.

"I've got to go—over to my office," he told me, perceptibly hesitating before stating his destination.

About ten minutes after he had gone, when, having abandoned my effort to arrive at an understanding of his odd manner, I had taken up a book, Herrick walked in.

"Eugene not at home?"

"No. He has been called over to his office."

"Well, why do I go through the formula of asking for him anyway?—when we both know it is not he that I come to see! As you jolly well know, if you're intelligent, I'd never step foot in here to see Eugene!"

"Yet you won't come near me when you know he is out of town!—the only case on record of your paying any attention to public opinion!"

"For your sake, not my own. Ah!" he suddenly exclaimed, "I'm glad to see this!"

He crossed the room to my writing-desk by the window

over which I had hung a small portrait of my mother.

As he stood silently looking at it, his face grave and thoughtful, I went to his side; and together, for several minutes not speaking, we gazed at the beautiful loved face.

"That you can bear to have it here," he presently said, gently, "is a most gratifying sign to me, my dear, that you are recovering from your morbid view of things."

"I'm beginning to realize, Herrick, the very obvious but usually ignored truth that shame and disgrace can come only from within, never from without. Sounds as though I were quoting one of Eugene's lectures. But I'm not."

"No, you've delved that out for yourself! From your knowledge," he stated deliberately, "of Eugene."

I felt my face grow hot. I had not meant to betray myself like that. I had done it quite unconsciously. But Herrick was so pitilessly keen; and so brutally frank to me about Eugene!

"If you care for my happiness, Herrick, why are you all the time trying to expose Eugene to me in a bad light rather than—than put the best light on him?"

"It's because I do care for your happiness that I would have it built upon truth, not lies. Look!"

He drew aside the window curtains and pointed to the Academy building at the other end of the campus. "There's no light in Eugene's office. He's not there."

"Where is he?"

"Where he's ashamed or afraid to have you know!"

"Do you know where?"

"No."

"But, Herrick, my dear! To be suspicious about a

perfectly explainable thing like that!—his not being at his office!"

He promptly admitted (rather too promptly, I at once felt) that such a circumstance was of course explainable; then abruptly dropped the curtain and returned to the portrait.

"I can't tell you, Nancy, how glad I am to find you able to have this before your eyes again! And to find you realizing that nothing external to yourself can really disgrace you!"

"You know, Herrick, when I was a child, the bare idea of ever losing my mother was such a hideous blackness that I thought it just could not happen to me! And then when I think how glad I was to see her die and escape her misery!—that in all my agony and loneliness and shame, I've never wished her back for a moment!"

"Because you always were an unselfish little angel!"

"Eugene thinks I'm a monster of self-indulgence!"

"What does he think *he* is?"

"Well, he doesn't excessively dislike himself!"

"Surely, Nancy, this portrait must suggest something to Eugene?"

"What do you mean?" I asked with a start. "*Mother's* picture never appeared in public, Herrick!" I faltered.

"No, dear, I know," he soothingly answered. "I mean that this portrait is such a give-away of that nice little yarn of yours about being a country doctor's daughter! A portrait by Elihu Vedder! The style of dress and the pearls and the fine, exquisite face! *That* a country doctor's wife? Does Eugene think it?"

"When I first spoke of having a portrait of my mother in this room where he brings all our visitors, he said he

didn't want 'any family chromos hanging 'round to queer us'; and when he saw it,—well, he had never heard of Elihu Vedder, he thinks the pearls are genuine Woolworth's, and though he does think the face 'so refined as to give added tone to this room,' he suspects nothing."

"That's positively stupid of him!"

"He hasn't your experience of life to draw on, Herrick. I don't think it is stupidity."

"It's lack of perception. He simply is not sensitive to some things."

We left the window and strolled over to the couch before the fire.

The portrait of my mother set Herrick to reminiscing—"You know, Nancy, I remember so well my wonder over you when you were born—the first baby I had ever known at close range, though I was eight years old at the time. I used to sit by the hour watching you and speculating over you, not only with scientific curiosity over a queer specimen, but with an overwhelming compassion for your helplessness in contrast with my sturdiness; and as you developed, your sweetness and cuteness fascinated me. When you began to talk, everything you said seemed to me endearing and entrancing. How many little things I remember because they impressed me so much! Once when you were about three, you picked up an old story book and said, 'Oh, I haven't seen this book for *years and years!*' I thought that so funny, I'd wake in the night and laugh over it! I never can forget your radiant excitement over the little birthday party you had on your third birthday, with ten beautifully dressed children, a lot of gifts and the dining-room table brilliantly decorated. You kept saying, 'My birfday's in dimon-woom! Did you see my birfday in dimon-

woom?" And next morning your nurse told us that the first thing you said when you woke was, 'Want to go downstairs to my birfday in dimon-woom.' One of your gifts was a doll so large you could hardly handle it. The way you loved that doll! You'd make your nurse get up in the night to bring it to you in bed. Once when it bumped against your head and the nurse offered to spank it for hurting you, you said so tenderly, 'But it didn't mean to, Hannah!' A few days after your birthday, when you woke one afternoon from your nap and I told you that your mother and some other ladies had been in to look at you while you were asleep, you said, 'And did they say I was cute? And did you tell them 'bout my birfday in dimon-woom?' One day you said to me, 'Herry, I used to be a dear, dear little baby and now I'm a big, bright girl!' Once when your nurse was ill, you tidied your playroom yourself, looking very self-righteous and playing hard to the gallery (I being the gallery) and when your mother offered you a quarter for doing it, you said virtuously, 'I don't want anything, Mother!—but if you're going to give it to me, bring it over.'—Am I boring you?" he suddenly inquired.

"When you are talking so beautifully of *me*? If you could know what I'm feeling at your remembering all those little things about me!"

"Do you realize how cruel you were in leaving me for three long years in ignorance of where you were?"

"Did you ever try to find me, Herrick?"

"I did all that I could do without causing you any more publicity. I drew the line at that! But you had covered your tracks too completely. Of course a detective could have found you for me. But I would not resort to that. I did respect your wish to hide from me."

"Herrick, I thought I was doing you the greatest kindness in sparing you the embarrassment of your friendship for our disgraced family!"

"But you've grown into a larger view by now? You know now that you would be embarrassed to own *me* for a friend if the whole damnable situation had ever called up any emotion in my breast but stronger and deeper friendship for you!"

"I know that now—yes, Herrick!"

Our eyes met on it—a long look into each other's very hearts.

"You know, Nancy," he said quietly, drawing my hand into his clasp, "you and I are true mates—by the ruling of the gods!"

There was a sound of footsteps mounting the stairs. I glanced at the clock on the mantel. It was half past eleven. The next moment Eugene, appearing in the doorway, stopped short, and for an instant silently considered us, as we sat together on the big couch before the open fire.

CHAPTER X

HERRICK went away almost immediately, pausing only to remark to Eugene that one could never find him at home these days; to which Eugene offered no reply.

I was prepared to hear, as soon as Herrick was out of earshot, some sarcastic comments on the frequency of our being together and I braced myself for reproaches or criticism. But to my surprise, none were forthcoming. Eugene was very silent as we prepared for bed. Was he sulking? No, his manner seemed more conciliatory than offended or indignant. There was a troubled look about his eyes that smote me a bit; was I making him uneasy or actually causing him some unhappiness? I could hardly so flatter myself! And it was not like him to bear annoyance uncomplainingly.

I recalled how hastily he had intercepted my answering the telephone that evening; his guarded, nervous tone as he talked into the receiver; his telling me he was summoned to his office, but his office windows remaining black all the evening. Was he concealing some dark secret from me?

I concluded, however, that his forbearance probably meant nothing more than a feeling that since he constantly left me alone, he could hardly expect me to dismiss a visitor who presumably called to see him as well as me.

If he did feel any uneasiness at the apparently growing friendship between Herrick and me, it was not strong enough to overcome the lure that continued to take him

from home almost every evening; and whatever that lure was, it was not work at his office, for I never saw the windows in that wing of the Academy building lighted after he had left me.

Even my coming down with a severe and really serious case of grippe did not keep him by me for one night. When the doctor told him I must have a nurse, he installed Lottie as my day nurse and instructed our maid, Addie, that she would have to stay in with me every evening until I was well enough to be left alone.

Lottie, who I am sure was only too glad of such a chance as this to confirm some of her suspicions as to my way of housekeeping, most graciously and, as Eugene thought, generously, agreed to give me all the time she could spare from her own home and family. But Addie, to Eugene's indignation, promptly affirmed that for extra service at night she would have to have extra pay. Their discussion took place in the living room which adjoined the room where I was lying with a temperature of one hundred and five.

Now it had never become evident to Eugene's obtuse masculine perceptions that Addie, whose face seemed to him as childish as her cropped hair, her slim figure and her short frocks, was a grown woman who knew her own value so well as to be quite haughtily independent.

"But you need not give us any extra service, Addie—just even it up by omitting all the cleaning until Mrs. Curry is well again."

"It's the exter hours I got to be paid for. I'm used to my evenings off."

"A child like you ought not to be running out every evening. I am surprised that Mrs. Curry has allowed it."

The girl laughed derisively. "Allowed it! Every la-

boring man has his evenings, don't he? A servant ain't a slave these days, Mr. Curry!"

My fevered brain could picture Eugene's stare of astonishment during the instant's silence that followed this speech; the girl was usually so quiet and courteous.

"You'll get no extra pay for staying at home in the evening where in any case you ought to stay!" he affirmed. "I tell you I am not asking you to do any extra work. You can do *less*."

"I guess my evenings out is worth as much to me as yourn is to you, Mr. Curry. You don't see yourself stayin' in nights!"

"Tut, tut, Addie, you are saucy! I'm afraid you are trying to take advantage of Mrs. Curry's illness to get more wages—to work a hold up! A child like you! Outrageous! Understand me, you will not leave the house one evening until Mrs. Curry is well!"

"Whoopie! Bla—a! Well, Mr. Curry, I guess I'll take a vacation till Missus gets well. Me and you can't come to no understanding. I'm quittin'."

"You must not leave us in the lurch like that when we have illness and anxiety! To take such advantage of us!" he exclaimed in incredulous indignation.

"It's you that's tryin' to take advantage of me and save yourself the price of a nurse like the doc ordered!"

"You are impertinent! If Mrs. Curry allows you to talk like this, *I do not!*"

"She never give me no cause to. But you and me can't hit it off, Mr. Curry, so I'm quittin'. Anyways, I wouldn't work here with that sister of yourn nosin' into my affairs!—if you'll excuse me sayin' so. So I guess you and Mrs. Klam'll have to manage between yous. If she'll take care of Mrs. Curry through the day, you can take the night shift. When Mrs. Curry is well, I'll come back."

"No, Addie, if you leave now you can never come back."

"It ain't, as a general thing, the question whether I *can* go back to a place; it's whether the folks can get me back!" chuckled Addie.

Her footsteps moved towards the door; but Eugene stopped her. "Here's a suggestion—you can stay away through the day and come only at night; and for that I will pay you half your wages."

"Give up half my wages and board!" scoffed Addie. "Nothin' doin'! If I leave here I take another place. I got to have some place to eat, don't I?"

"Well, couldn't you work some where else through the day and come here in the evening? I'd pay you a dollar a week. That extra dollar would come in nicely for you."

"A dollar a night you mean," said Addie.

"I said I'd pay you half your week's wages for staying here just at night. A very generous offer!"

"Well, that'd be seven and a—"

"Addie! Addie!" I feebly screamed—and as the girl hurried in to me from the living room, I managed hastily to whisper to her before Eugene, slowly following, had reached the bedside, "I'll pay you what is right—don't discuss it with Dr. Curry—he does not understand such things—"

"All right—don't you worry about me, Missus!" she reassured me in a soothing tone which, ill as I was, made me suspect that she probably understood far more as to the condition of things in my home than I had ever meant her to.

"What is it, dear?" asked Eugene, putting her aside and laying a large cold hand on my burning head.

"Quiet! I must have quiet! Don't argue—I can't bear it!"

"There, there, all right, my dear!"

He motioned Addie to follow him out of the room. But when she vigorously shook her head to indicate that she meant to stay with me, he turned from the bedside and tip-toed away.

"Addie!" I whispered faintly, "don't let them drive you away. Don't let Mrs. Klam worry you into leaving! Whatever happens, *don't leave me!* Promise!"

But if she did promise, I did not hear her, for I suddenly collapsed with exhaustion into a state of semiconsciousness.

For some days after that I was too weak and too stupefied from fever to know anything that was going on. When the crisis was past and I began to come back to life, I found, to my relief, that Addie and not Lottie was taking care of me.

Addie told me all about it when I was able to listen. Mrs. Klam, she said, had attempted to "run" her; to criticise her "extravagance"; to reorganize her whole working routine—

"At first I didn't pay no attention—just left her gas away whiles I went ahead and done as I always had did. *She* wasn't hirin' me. Then she tried to *make* me do her way and when I still didn't pay no more attention than if she was a toad, she got mad and told your Mister to send me off and *she'd* take care of you evenings as well as through the day. He tol' me to go and offered me *two dollars* fur the week! I just laughed and tol' him I was workin' fur you and you'd pay me when you was able—and that I *wasn't leavin'!* Not unless *you* fired me! He sayed he'd get the *po*-lice to put me out. So me, I just phomed to the Doc to come 'round here as soon as he otherwise could. And I put it to him—how I'd passed you my promise I wouldn't leave you and that if you did pull

through, you'd mebbly have a *re-lapse* if you found I'd went. The Doc he sayed he'd anyhow noticed you was less restless when I nursed you than when Mrs. Klam was fussin' 'round you and that your condition bein' serious, if Dr. Curry didn't want to get a trained nurse he must leave *me* take care of you and get some one else to do the housework. But Dr. Curry he tol' the Doc that Mrs. Klam was a good nurse and that me he was discharging. Then the Doc he sayed that if I was discharged, a trained nurse must come or he'd drop the case, fur Mrs. Klam was a strain on you that you was too weak to stand. I heard your Mister tell his sister that he wouldn't of gave in to the Doc, but that two of his boys was at the Academy; and he was afraid, too, he says, that the Doc might talk ugly 'round Leitersville, and to be sure, he says, seein' how the Doc 'tends all the best families, he'd sure have a *chanct* to talk all right! So then Mrs. Klam she sayed she would *not* stay if I stayed, and she ain't been near since and I must say it's a good rid-dance! Well, I guess! Say, the way that woman don't hate herself gives me a pain! Your Mister he eats over at her house and I do what housework I can between whiles."

It seemed that Eugene had not yet discovered the fact that Addie was receiving from me more than two dollars a week, though I was pretty sure that *she* by this time, was perfectly aware of the deception I imposed upon him.

"One night," Addie continued her recital, her voice falling into a tone of awe, "me and the Doc us we thought you might die! And the Doc he sayed we must get Mister home. It was eleven o'clock and *I* didn't know where he was at. Doc he phomed all 'round, to the Academy and to Mrs. Klam's and to a couple of trustees—and then I

sayed, "Try Dr. Appleton." But Dr. Appleton he sayed Dr. Curry wasn't with *him*, but he'd find him if he had to call on the *po-lice*! And sure enough, in fifteen minutes he had him here. *He* knew where to look fur him. And say, Missus, mebbly both them gents wasn't white and scared! Gee whiz!"

If Addie knew, she did not volunteer any information as to where Dr. Curry had been found by Dr. Appleton—and I did not ask her.

During my convalescence I saw very little of Eugene. Of course his taking his meals at Lottie's kept him away from home even more than usual. He generally managed to visit me at least once a day for a few minutes. But there were some days when I did not see him at all.

Herrick kept my room filled with flowers; and when I was able to sit up he spent some hours every day with me, reading or talking. I found that he had been terribly frightened about me.

"I want to ask you something, Herrick," I said to him one day. "Tell me where you found Eugene the night you thought I might be dying?"

There was a perceptible pause before he answered quite glibly, "Oh, I met him on the street. On his way home."

Herrick was a very poor liar. However, if he thought it better not to tell me the truth, I would not urge him.

In my hours alone, I often wondered whether Eugene did not care for me at all any longer—except to lust after me! He would, I well knew, be ardent enough as soon as I was again well and blooming! And I had once fondly dreamed that I would always mean to him all that he at that time had meant to me—romance, poetry, beauty, religion!

CHAPTER XI

ABOUT twice a week Eugene and I went out to some social affair and these were the only evenings we ever spent in the same place. Frequently at these functions I met Miss Dorothy Renzheimer who, while she gushed over Eugene, ignored me. She and Eugene invariably managed to get away together for a tête-à-tête; either disappear entirely for an hour, or separate themselves from the rest of the company by repairing to a far corner, or to the stairway, or to an alcove.

It was quite evident to both him and me that I was not popular at these social gatherings. He attributed it to the fact that I was "not up to them."

When an invitation came to us to a large dance at the Renzheimers' home, I pointed out to Eugene that we could not accept it, since the Renzheimers had not only never called to see me, but had unmistakably indicated by their attitude and manner to me that they did not want to have any relations with me.

"Why would they ask us if they don't want us?" he asked sullenly.

"They do want *you*. But it's very 'green' of them to suppose they can have you at their party when they've made it impossible for your wife to go to their house!"

"The Renzheimers green!" he smiled. "That from you! My dear child, when once you see their gorgeous house and their ballroom and the supper they'll serve and—"

"I'll not see it, for of course I can't go."

"Suit yourself. But I'm going."

"The invitation requires an answer. Shall we send your acceptance and my regret together or separately?" I, in my turn, smiled.

"Leave it to me," he answered curtly; but I am sure my question found him at a loss.

"Aren't you afraid," I inquired, "of seeming 'countrified'—accepting an invitation which your wife can't accept?"

"I've known the Renzheimers intimately for three years. No reason why I should stand on formality with them. I can't let myself be hampered, my dear, by your failure to please them; by their not finding you up to them."

I made no reply. We were at breakfast. I no longer ever saw him alone except at meals. The silence that fell between us was rather heavy. Now and then I found him casting an uneasy glance at me across the table. But neither of us spoke. And when presently he rose to go to the Academy, he omitted his usual parting kiss; not because he was offended with me, but because he thought I must be offended with him, or at least hurt.

I did leave it to him to answer the invitation and I never asked him how he had formulated his answer, partly because I was not curious, but more because I knew he would refuse to answer such a direct and personal question.

It was about this time that there came to me the blessed knowledge that the passionate longing of my heart was going to be realized—I was going to have a baby. This was to me a stupendous experience and if it had come to me a bit earlier, before I had become quite so disillusioned, it would have been an ecstasy so great that all the bitter suffering that had led to my hiding away from that world in which I had been reared, would have been wiped out, forgotten, leaving only faint

shadows in the place of the deep scars my spirit bore.

But now, in the midst of my trembling joy, doubts assailed me, doubts which I tried to smother as fast as they were born; disloyal doubts which must not live in my heart towards the father of my baby. For the indifference, the coolness which had been creeping upon me in the past months I found giving way, now, to a sense of quite helpless dependence upon my husband, to a longing for the protection of his strength in my weakness and perhaps peril; for his love as I had first known it; for a spiritual union with him which should make ready a home for our child. And I longed as well to pour out upon him the great tenderness that seemed to fill my heart towards every living thing.

Eagerly I looked for a propitious time to break the good news to him. But the right moment seemed amazingly elusive. He must hurry away directly after breakfast; his luncheon he frequently took at the Academy refectory; and after dinner he hated to be interrupted in his reading of the daily paper; when that was done he must hurry off to his nightly rendezvous, whatever it was—

And while I watched and waited, quivering with eagerness, for the happy moment when I could quietly tell him of the blessedness that was to be ours, and see his proud thankfulness, see his tender, protecting love for me reborn, see him, for his child's sake, rise to his best and truest self—those ugly doubts would thrust up their heads; was it right to bring a child into the world born of lust, not of love; hampered possibly by an inheritance from its father of pitiable characteristics and from its maternal grandfather of a tendency to hideous vice? What chance would my child have?

I could only hope that in the sacredness of that hour when I would tell Eugene my great news and he would

take me in his arms and fold me to his heart, cherishing and helping me, a high resolve would be born in both our souls to be worthy of the holy gift of a child.

For of course I knew that all men who were not brutes or savages revered a woman with child; that husbands at these times were utterly tender and devoted and very anxious. I sighed happily as I considered what a pleasant change it was going to be from the cold, aloof relation in which we had been living, broken only by occasional gusts of passion.

But when I had waited in vain for over a week for a moment when Eugene would not be in too much of a hurry for a quiet half hour with me, I found that I would have to deliberately force the occasion for a talk with him.

It was one evening when we had finished our after dinner coffee upstairs in the living room, and he was about to take up his newspaper that, my heart beating thickly, I sat down beside him on the big couch before the fire.

"I have something to tell you, dear."

He reached across my lap to get the newspaper that lay on the couch. But I took his outstretched hand in mine. "Wait a minute, dear. I must talk with you."

"Hurry up then—I must go out soon—and I've not had a minute all day to read the papers."

"You won't be much interested in the papers," I said beaming, "and you won't want to go out, when you've heard my news!"

"Indeed?" he returned skeptically. "Well? Be quick, my dear."

"Eugene! Think of it! Think of what is coming to us! We're going to have a baby!"

"Oh, my dear, what a nuisance!"

I did not move or speak. But I think my face must have gone white.

"I ought not to say that, I suppose. But I really don't especially want a child. And I'm rather afraid of the expense. A child, these days, costs a mint!—Are you quite sure?"

I nodded. I could not speak.

"How long have you known?"

"A week." My voice was a whisper.

"Then there's no hope that you might be mistaken?"

I shook my head.

"I wish we'd been more prudent! It was only yesterday that I paid the doctor's bill for your grip attack. A wife surely is an expensive luxury!" he said ruefully, lifting his free hand to pinch my cheek. "Well, of course if it is inevitable, we shall have to make the best of it."

He drew his hand from my clasp and again reached for his newspaper. This time I did not stop him.

"You'll have to be careful of yourself," he continued as he noisily rustled his paper in unfolding it. "Don't let us have any *avoidable* doctor bills. And I certainly think that with the expense of a confinement looming ahead of us, you ought to dismiss Addie until you get to the pass where you will *have* to have her."

I did not reply. I felt turned to ice. The foundations of my life seemed to have dropped out. How little I had known him! I would not have conceived it possible that he would take my announcement like this. The grotesque contrast to what I had expected might have moved me to hysterical laughter if I had not been at the moment so stonily without feeling.

He was reading his paper now; had immediately become engrossed in it; was apparently unmindful of me at his side, white and cold.

It seemed to me that, sitting so near me, he must *feel*

what was going on in my soul—the terrible revulsion from him—my very flesh shrinking in disgust from his *commonness*. It was that—his commonness—which I felt almost to the exclusion of any wound to my heart.

“He has the peasant’s brutal view of a woman! There’s not a fine thing about him! He is simply coarse and *common*!”

It was this sudden clear recognition of his inherent vulgarity, the constant evidences of which I was always trying to gloss over in my mind and excuse, that killed in that hour my reviving love for him.

Of course I could see many palliating causes for his lack of fineness; there were his blood, his rearing, the Pennsylvania Dutch standards, the peasant stolid acceptance of maternity as a merely natural process, nothing to make a fuss about from either a sentimental or physical view of it; babies were born almost as frequently and easily as calves or pigs—with the disadvantage of being far more expensive and in the end less profitable. Often the birth of a calf or a litter of pigs gave more satisfaction. This was, I felt in every sick nerve of me, Eugene’s brutish view of my “condition.” It was more horrible to me than anything I had as yet learned about him; he had suddenly become to me what he had never quite been before—an object of repulsion and loathing.

For twenty minutes while he read his paper I never moved or stirred.

When he had finished, he tossed it across my lap to the other end of the couch, yawned, stretched and rose to his feet.

“Going out for a while,” he announced as usual. “Good-by.”

He bent and kissed my unresponding lips and, not no-

ting anything unusual in my manner or face, turned away and went downstairs. After a moment I heard the front door open and close.

In my stupid blindness I had looked forward to an evening in his arms, petted and cherished; to a wonderful and rapturous communion over our coming child; to fascinating and exciting discussion of its education, its rearing, even its clothes that I must begin to get ready.

And here I was, just as on every other evening—alone. Sadder and lonelier than I had ever felt before during all the heavy sordid days of my married life.

What saved me, by the grace of God, from bitterness and cynicism was the very lively consciousness I had of two things—my baby and Herrick Appleton.

CHAPTER XII

I THINK it was astonishment rather than grief that I experienced constantly during those first weeks of pregnancy. Eugene's taking it all as a matter-of-course, manifesting no sense of responsibility for my welfare, no concern for my happiness during this trying and burdensome time, going his way as regardless of me as he had always been; never dreaming of inquiring how I was; of doing any least thing to divert or give me pleasure; of paying me any lover-like attention—when I had fondly supposed that I would be his first and dearest consideration; that his every thought would be for me, to do all in his power to help me through the difficult days—

I had never imagined that any man could be like this at such a time. It seemed to me just coarse; monstrous. But the saddest aspect of it all was that it did not deeply hurt me; that on the night I had told him of the baby, the last shadow of the high ideal I had had of him had vanished and that now he had no longer any power to wound me.

He was very far from knowing this, for in my weakened physical state I was supersensitive on the surface and easily moved to tears.

But I did not pity myself, I pitied him, for his blindness in having forfeited such a love as I had had for him. He would have found it so easy to keep it! And surely it had been worth keeping!

He was very insistent upon Addie's leaving us for a few months—until I managed to convince him that it would be his own comfort and convenience that he would certainly sacrifice in discharging her.

When he learned that almost as soon as I knew of my condition I had, as a matter-of-course, engaged a trained nurse for my ordeal, he was incensed. "Consult me before you go ahead and incur needless expense! Lottie can take care of you in your confinement. You won't need a nurse. Anyway, not a trained nurse; there are inexpensive practical nurses that are just as good. My mother had eight children and never had a nurse for one of them."

"And five of them died in infancy," I reminded him.

He had never a suspicion of the shocks he was giving me by what seemed to me his gross insensibility to all that was due me at this time.

To avoid nerve-wracking argument with him, I did not tell him of my further arrangements for my confinement; of my engaging a room at the Leitersville Hospital so that I might elude Lottie's interference. I foresaw that I would be obliged to establish myself at the hospital well in advance of my time, while I was still able to help myself, or Eugene would certainly prevent my involving him in so much expense.

"He will one day be summoned to the hospital to find me there cozily settled in my room," I decided.

I shuddered to think of what my situation would be if I were penniless. "The State ought to pension every pregnant woman for two years; but the State only pensions those who murder for her, not those who create!"

I wondered how I would act under the present circumstances if I were as dependent on Eugene as he supposed me to be. Of one thing I was sure—I would fight for my child's best good with my last breath.

"Dr. Baker wants to see you this morning at his office," I told Eugene one morning at breakfast; Dr. Baker was our physician.

"What for?"

"He'll tell you."

"Why don't *you* tell me, if you know."

"I—I can't."

"Nonsense, my dear! What is it?"

"You'll have to go to him, Eugene."

"Is it about your condition?—or about his sons at the Academy?"

"About—yourself."

He stared. "When did he tell you he wanted to see me?"

"Yesterday."

"Well? Do be explicit! Did he come here to tell you or did he telephone?"

"I went to his office to put myself in his care from now on until—"

"Nancy, that's perfectly useless extravagance!" he said, flushing with displeasure, but his voice, as always, low, smooth, almost hushed. "Putting yourself in the doctor's care for six months! The way you do pamper yourself! Any one would think I was a millionaire! It's utter nonsense! Lottie can tell you anything you want to know. She's been through it all. Ask *her*. Don't keep running to the highest priced doctor in town!"

I mopped away the tears that were so near the surface these days and answered in an unsteady voice, "I was in pain."

"I didn't know that!" he returned, relenting. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"You could see it for yourself if you ever noticed me."

"But, Nancy, he's probably just working you for a big fee if he says you've got to be in his care from now on until your confinement. That's absurd. You are not that ill."

I would not discuss the point. "You must see him to-day," I repeated.

"What *about?*" he insisted irritably. "Is there something wrong with you?"

"No. Everything's all right. It's *you*—"

"What on earth do you mean?"

"He wants to instruct you—"

"Instruct me? Huh! As to how I must keep you in cotton wadding and pamper you to your hurt! No one understands so well as Dr. Baker does how to swell his own bank account by getting on the right side of the women! Next thing, he'll order a trip south for you, or a month at Atlantic City! He makes the wives of this town perfectly useless to their husbands—and the husbands pay the bills! Well, I shan't trouble him to 'instruct' me! I've a better use for my spare time—and for my money too!"

I was so sure, however, that since Dr. Baker was not only a valuable patron of the Academy, but a citizen of standing and influence, Eugene would not only go to see him, but would heed his instructions, that I proceeded to act on this conviction that very morning by moving my belongings across the hall to the guest room and establishing myself there.

"Celibacy during pregnancy, for the good of both the child and the mother," was the doctor's pronouncement.

I had not foreseen that the effect of this upon Eugene would be to make him almost unbearably irritable, like a man suddenly deprived of his usual eight cigars a day. But either Dr. Baker had succeeded in impressing upon him a sense of responsibility for his wife and child, or else Eugene knew *me* to feel that responsibility very deeply for he did not diverge from the doctor's orders. I paid a price, however, for his forbearance—my endur-

ance of the vicious temper which the circumstances seemed to develop in him.

During the first six weeks that I was with child I was in abject and ignominious misery every minute of the day and night and I looked a ghastly sight—blotchy spots on my face, dark circles under my eyes, my hair lusterless and lifeless, it was truly appalling.

Eugene did not conceal his distaste for my altered looks. He actually shunned me. But Herrick said to me one day, when I asked him how he could bear to look at such a "chromo" as I was, "So long as your face expresses *you*, you are beautiful to me!"

His constant consideration and delicate thoughtfulness for me at this time brought out in rather vivid relief that indifference of Eugene's which more and more seemed to me a true expression of his inherent lack of breeding.

At the end of six weeks, my physical misery very suddenly came to an end and I felt perfectly well, except for the heaviness and fatigue which were of course inevitable. And with the cessation of my suffering my appearance changed; my complexion cleared and bloomed, my hair glistened, my eyes sparkled and I realized, to my pleased surprise, that I had never been better looking. I think it is only very rarely that pregnancy causes a woman to bloom and glow with a greater radiance than she ever has at other times; but so it was with me. I saw men look at me with eyes that said to me what every woman understands—"You are a desirable woman!" At the parties to which Eugene and I continued to go a few times a week, my unpopularity with the women was not lessened by the fact that their husbands apparently found me attractive.

This change in me produced in Eugene an increase of his irritability, a sullenness, and sometimes a dull fury

that were a revelation to me of some phases of life of which I had been very ignorant.

Sometimes when Herrick happened to be a witness to these displays of temper, or to my husband's complete lack of chivalry towards me, his letting me climb the steep stairs of our old house for a wrap, his not paying any attention to me, not waiting upon me, which, under the present circumstances, seemed so beastly,—Herrick quite openly expressed his disgust.

"You might at least have married a gentleman, Nancy, even if he did have to be a fool!" he burst out one evening when we found ourselves alone after some particularly crass behavior on Eugene's part.

"Oh, Herrick, please don't talk to me like that!"

"Don't be conventional, my dear!"

"If it's being conventional to have a sense of decency! And you know," I added, a breathless catch in my voice, "my father was called a gentleman!"

"Yes," Herrick almost groaned, "'the most perfect gentleman of his time,' 'a gentleman of the old school,' 'a Chesterfield,' the newspapers called him."

"His unfailing, exquisite courtesy to Mother!—while living a secret life of hideous shame!" I shuddered. "The word 'gentleman' can never mean much to me any more, Herrick!"

Herrick had nothing to answer to that.

It was just about this time that at one of Eugene's popular lectures delivered before a large and more than usually enthusiastic audience, Herrick and I, sitting together, heard him tell to his spellbound hearers, "The wisest man is not he who merely *sees* farthest and deepest, but he whose love for mankind outruns his knowledge. Seeing without loving is like looking upon shadows." "It is not through churches or Bibles that we rise to God, but

through unselfish associations with our fellow-men." "Your doubts may be more truly religious than other men's convictions and take you nearer to God. Do not crush, but meet them." "Don't feel it incumbent upon yourself to make other people good; it will fully occupy you to keep yourself good." "It ill becomes you to talk about your rights until you have recognized and performed your duties." "Your griefs you may use, if you will, to sweeten and enrich rather than to embitter and impoverish your soul." "Hate trembles before the clear eyes of Love."

I thought of his mother; of his child that he did not want; of his ill-concealed bitterness that he had missed his chance to marry Dorothy Renzheimer's fortune—

Herrick and I, side by side in the packed auditorium of the Civic Club, avoided looking at each other.

CHAPTER XIII

“**I** DO hope,” Lottie said to me, “that when you begin to *show* it, you’ll act genteel about it and keep out of sight! Especially of the Academy boys!” she shuddered.

She advised Eugene that as it was “up to” him and me to give a party in return for all the hospitality we were accepting, we ought to do it before I began to look conspicuous.

So Eugene broached the matter at breakfast one morning. “It seems to me, Nancy, that you have been about in Leitersville quite enough, now, to have learned how to give a big dinner. Do you feel you can venture to put it through?”

“I’m by nature daring and adventurous, my dear, so if you think it is necessary to give a dinner you’ll not find me wanting in courage!”

“Of course it is necessary. If we don’t entertain, we won’t be invited.”

There spoke the Pennsylvania Dutchman who did not give something for nothing.

“And you want to be invited?” I asked.

“My wife’s got to take her right position here—there’s to be no shirking that; most women would be glad of the chance you have to get into Leitersville’s best set. But you have so little ambition and pride, Nancy! I wish you were more like Lottie!”

“My ambition and pride don’t soar towards such unattainable heights!”

He dismissed this heavy irony with a shrug. “To be

sure I did hope," he continued, "that before we had to entertain, you would get a chance to see how the Leiters and Renzheimers serve a dinner. Of course no one else here entertains so elaborately. But," he added, "when you did have that chance, you refused to take advantage of it. You *might* have gone to their dance even if they hadn't called on you. You could afford to compromise a bit when you think who they are!"

"But that's it—when I think who, or rather what, they are, I can't compromise. Miss Dorothy Renzheimer has taken such a lot of trouble, Eugene, to let me know she doesn't like me, that I think she must have been very much in love with you."

"How penetrating we are!" he scoffed. "That isn't why they've cut you. It's because they don't care particularly for people who are not a bit spiffy."

"I'll try to be resigned."

"Dear me, we do think our irony is clever, don't we?"

I wondered whether he would insist upon my inviting these Renzheimers to our dinner. I didn't really care—

But it seemed that even he realized that, in view of their open antagonism to me, it would be incongruous to invite them. "The Renzheimers' recognition is really necessary to your real success here," he said, "and so, although we can't ask them to our dinner, I want to give such an elaborate affair that they and others will *hear* about it!"

"Oh, Eugene, don't be so darned silly!"

It came from me involuntarily. I did not mean to say it. It was no part of my rôle to criticise him like that.

He looked surprised and offended. He considered snubbing *his* prerogative. "It is only because you have had so little worldly experience, Nancy, that you think such things silly."

"It is because *you* have had so little that you don't think them silly!"

"But I have had a lot of worldly experience—four years at Princeton and two years here," he protested.

"You call Leitersville the world?"

"There's a lot of wealth and fashion here."

"Eugene," I asked, genuinely puzzled, "don't you really feel Leitersville's vulgarity?"

"All fashionable society is spiritually vulgar, I suppose."

"No, I mean quite concretely and definitely its social vulgarity."

"Do you feel yourself competent to judge of that?" he shrugged. "Why, I'm not even sure you know enough to get up this dinner party properly."

I began to wonder how it was to be done—this "getting up" a dinner party "properly"—with one maid, no caterer in the town, and no extra help available except the rather inexperienced Academy servants. It was one thing to give a dinner under such circumstances, I reflected, and quite another when you had a staff of trained servants. I knew how Leitersville hostesses slaved over their parties. My heart sank as I thought of going to all that trouble, all that useless waste of my time and vitality, for a thing that it seemed to me would give no one any satisfaction.

"I wonder why," I said to Eugene, "these Leitersville women spend themselves so over this thing they call 'society'; I don't believe they get any real amusement from it."

"Because *you* have no social gift, or any taste for society—"

"But I have a taste for *real* society—where there's

wit, genuine fun, interchange of ideas, exciting discussion—”

“You don’t find that kind of thing in society, my child,” he smiled at my ignorance and inexperience. “You’d find it in Appleton’s Forum!”

“But of course there *is* such a thing as brilliant society—groups of artists and intellectuals and—”

“Much you know about it!” he interrupted, passing me his cup for more coffee.

“If you knew more about it, my dear,” I answered as I filled his cup, “you couldn’t stand what they call ‘society’ here—coming together to eat a big meal and exchange platitudes and bromides. If one should have the temerity, at a Leitersville party, to drop a live idea, it would create consternation—get one suspected! And for this feast of the body and famine of the soul, a hostess will slave like a dog for days! Must I be as insane as the rest of them and lend myself to such futile business?”

“The penalty for being so very superior to one’s neighbors, as you fondly think yourself, my dear, is that they let you severely alone!”

“If people in our circumstances had the courage to ask their friends to perfectly simple meals, simply served—will you let me do that, Eugene?”

But no, he wanted to “do it up with swank.”

“It will be expensive, you know,” I warned him guilefully.

“Well, we shall have to make that up by retrenching in other directions. In gasoline, for instance. Use the trolley car.”

“Shall you use the trolley cars?”

“I haven’t time. It would be a false economy for me. *You* have all the time there is.”

"I find it necessary to avoid trolleys these days for fear I have a child with weird complexes!—the signs in the trolleys obsess me so—I can't forget them. Ever notice Leitersville trolley car signs?—

"IT'S E. Z. TO MOVE WHEN YOU HIRE E. ZEITER'S MOVING VAN.

"DADDY, JOIN MOTHER IN THE PUREST DRINK OF ALL—MILK. DAIRY PRODUCTS CO.

"SAFETY FIRST. BE CAREFUL, DADDY, DON'T GET HURT. WE'D MISS YOU AT HOME. The School of Commerce has one—AFTER SEVEN O'CLOCK WHAT? DO YOU WASTE PRECIOUS EVENINGS IN A MAD SCRAMBLE FOR PLEASURE, OR ARE YOU DEVELOPING YOUR CHARACTER AND ACCUMULATING KNOWLEDGE? The witty ones—MAKE YOUR DOLLARS HAVE MORE SENSE. But when they fall into poetry, I'm lost! The Merchants' Trust Company has a poem—

"When rainy days come
You're snug and content,
For your money has earnt
Just 4%.'

Then there's Johnson's Cough Drops—

"Stop that tickle
For a nickel.'

You see, my dear, the mental furniture I accumulate from riding on trolley cars! What kind of a child will I have! No, we can't save on gasoline. Better cut out desserts."

But Eugene required desserts; the kind Addie made had become essential to his well-being. "It's not necessary to skimp the table. Lottie can advise you how

to get up this dinner without unnecessary expense. Consult her. She knows how to do these things very economically."

She did. The two parties Lottie had given in Leitersville had been actually parsimonious, though the account of them in the *Leitersville Gazette*, contributed by Elmer's own pen and printed in the column headed *Social Whirl of Leitersville*, stated that the "floral decorations" were pink roses (there had been three rosebuds in a vase on the dining-room table) that a collation was served at ten-thirty (the "collation" was grape juice and cake) that "an artistic and cultured program was rendered" (Florence had recited a hymn and Elmer had sung, shrilly and jerkily, two very sentimental love songs) Elmer, who thought he had a literary style and often told "folks" that the only reason he was not a writer was because he was a musician, concluded his account of the party with the statement, "A pleasant time was participated in by all and social conversation."

"The most comfortable way to give parties," I declared, "would be for each guest to bring his own dinner! Economical for the host and easy for the hostess."

"I must admit," said Eugene "that you have caught on to some things, Nancy, more readily than Lottie has; you don't, for instance, let Addie serve our soup at dinner in bouillon cups. I was mortified at that break Lottie made at her first dinner! Went and rented those bouillon cups on purpose!"

"I told her to use soup plates and offered to lend her mine," I said, "but she thought bouillon cups 'much more swell' and was sure I didn't know."

"Well, that's one thing you did know and she didn't. And her finger bowls were so full of water you could not dip your fingers in them without their overflowing! I

hope you'll escape any such mortifying breaks?"

He proceeded to instruct me on some points which he thought might have escaped me in my observation of Leitersville table manners and customs. I listened without comment and succeeded in keeping my face gravely attentive.

Later that morning, without having consulted Eugene, I called at Herrick's house to ask him whether he would care to come to our dinner, and I had time, while I waited in his study for his Chinaman to summon him, to examine some new pictures he had hung on the walls since last I had been here—gruesome, awful things!—Ryan Walker's *Without a Kennel*, Roger Bloche's *Cold*, Théophile Stemlen's *The Liberatress*, Kerr's *The Hand of Fate*, Lilien's *The Vampire*—all of them depicting the most hideous and cruel inhumanity.

"How can you live with such pictures of cruel suffering about?" I demanded with a shiver as he came in to me.

"You would keep such brutal suffering from your sight, I would blot it from the earth! You could not stand it on your walls, I can't stand it in the world! These pictures should stare one in the face every day, every hour, until what they represent is banished to the hell from which it came! Well," he added, cooling down, coming to me and taking both my hands in his, "I hope you are here to announce that, having left Eugene, you've come to live with me?"

"Herrick, I've got to give a dinner two weeks from to-day. Do you want to come to it?"

"I'd go to hell to be near you, Nancy! Will you put me next to you? So that if I become too overcharged with the gibes I shall want to fling, I can ease myself by spitting them out to you."

"You must promise to behave pretty! I want Eugene

to be satisfied with this party. Oh, Herrick, if you'd hear that poor man anxiously instructing me as to how you place knives and forks and what he calls 'the two-plate service,' and so on!"

"Gosh!" Herrick grinned. "You're improving fast when you can make fun of him!"

"Oh!" I broke out impetuously, "if I could not laugh at him a little how could I *stand* him!"

My own words appalled me as I heard them. My face burned as I met Herrick's keen, grave eyes piercing me.

"Don't look at me like that!" I almost sobbed. "Your eyes bore like gimlets! Leave me *some* mental privacy, Herrick! I despise myself for flaunting my disloyalty!"

"Nonsense! Don't be damned sentimental, my dear. Face facts squarely."

"Do you think one is happier for being disillusioned?"

"That's weak. Happiness at the cost of stupid blindness is not for *you*, Nancy—since you're neither stupid nor blind!"

I turned away from him, went to the window and stared out over the Avenue, seeing nothing, the dull, heavy thumping of my heart making me feel physically faint.

He came and stood behind me. But he did not speak.

"Do you know," I presently said, surprise and even wonder in my voice, "I can close my eyes and see Eugene as he appeared to me while we were engaged—a Greek god! A man of high attainments and consecrated life, whose attitude to the world could make him say, 'Why take a pilgrimage to the Holy Land when the Holy Land is here where you walk with your fellow-men?' Oh, Herrick, that exalted being, that young prophet with a flaming vision, is dead and the man I am living with is a complete stranger to me, an alien of another race!"

Isn't it weird that some one you thought you knew as you knew yourself, can become transformed into an absolutely different person when you come to live with him? It's uncanny!"

"Nancy! Stop looking so childishly innocent, or I'll crush you in my arms! Go home!—and if you can't come here looking less alluring than you are in that warm brown coat and hat, stay away, for God's sake!"

"Herrick, did you ever meet the young Mrs. Charles Leiter that has just come home to Leitersville after a year in Europe; whom every one seems to speak of with awe? Apparently, she's much, oh, *much* holier than the Renzheimers and the rest of the Leiter family! Is she truly anything remarkable?"

"Yes, she is. Charles Leiter, who is heir to old Jake's power and millions, is not crude like the rest of the family; like his bouncing sister and niece, Mrs. Renzheimer and Dorothy, for instance. He is the youngest child and only son of old Jake and no money was spared in educating him. He's not only a highly sophisticated and polished product, but he really is interesting; and the girl he has married is charming. To Leitersville she seems to be the last word in class exclusiveness—I suppose because she doesn't go to their parties; I'm sure they're incapable of recognizing what really does set her apart as different from themselves—since they have never recognized it in you! She and Charles are away a great deal and as they come here only to rest up they keep to themselves mostly. Leitersville finds them rather inaccessible. To secure Mrs. Charles Leiter for a social function would be a triumph for any hostess. Yet, she's a very simple girl; as simple as you are, my dear. About your age, too. Once a year she and Charles give a gorgeous

tea or lawn party or something at their beautiful house on Leiters Hill and invite all their Leitersville acquaintances, and that's their sole contact with Leitersville society. You see, Charles Leiter's wife can do what the wife of the Academy Head Master can't do—she can be royally independent of Leitersville's approval or disapproval. It's because they know she is impervious to anything they may say or think, that they regard her with awe. But she is really much more democratic than they are. She's entirely sympathetic with what I am trying to do here. In short, my dear, she belongs to your world and mine."

"And she is Dorothy Renzheimer's aunt!"

"By marriage, yes."

"I envy her the privilege of cutting their parties," I sighed.

It was just at this moment that the Chinaman appeared in the doorway of the study and announced, "Mrs. Charles Leiter."

As I turned to look at Herrick in questioning surprise, the eager expectation in his face gave me suddenly, to my astonishment and dismay, the sharpest pang of jealousy I had ever known in my life.

CHAPTER XIV

AS a theme of conversation in Leitersville society, the leading place so long held by the little nude swimmers seemed now to have been usurped, temporarily at least, by the more interesting subject of Mrs. Charles Leiter. Her holding herself aloof as she did; never coming down from her home on Leiters Hill to honor their social gatherings; never appearing at church, which in Leitersville was practically a social club; not even attending the parties given by her husband's elder sister, Mrs. Renzheimer—all this inaccessibility, I learned, endowed her, in the Leitersville mind, with a subtle fascination which enhanced her social value far beyond that accorded to mere lavishness of entertaining.

Eugene had a great deal to say about her. He seemed to love to talk about her, as though it gave him an agreeable sense of intimacy with one whom it was creditable to know.

"*There's* a young lady of distinction!" he would say admiringly. "I was talking to her this morning for a minute on the sidewalk. She certainly does carry herself as though she were used to things!" "Now there's a woman, Nancy, that you couldn't pretend to find commonplace as you pretend to find most people here. She *is* an aristocrat! Even as inexperienced a girl as you are would have to recognize that." "Mrs. Charles Leiter drives her own car and she certainly does sit up in that car with an air!" "Mrs. Renzheimer would feel awfully set up if she could get her brother Charles' wife to one of

her dinners. But she can't! Mrs. Leiter would rather come to one of my lectures. She told me so."

Somehow, when he went on in this vein, I winced from telling him of my acquaintance with his paragon; of the friendship that had so quickly and spontaneously sprung up between us after our meeting at Herrick's; of our daily walks into the country, our drives, our long intimate talks; the simple truth being that as Mrs. Charles Leiter, only two years older than I, had always in Leitersville found herself as stranded and starved spiritually as I was, we had almost immediately, with Herrick clearing the way for us, found ourselves so sympathetic and congenial in our tastes and ideas, that nothing could have been more natural and inevitable than our present friendship.

This growing intimacy seemed thus far to have escaped Leitersville's vigilance. It is true Mrs. Leiter's car was several times seen driving into the Academy grounds, but no one dreamed that she was calling on me, since it was known that she never paid calls; and as our walks and drives were all into the country and our visiting done in the seclusion of our homes during the hours favorable to uninterrupted companionship, we had not yet roused any comment on the situation.

I dreaded Eugene's inevitable discovery of it; to have to endure his vulgar elation, his snobbish satisfaction, his feeling of triumph over the less fortunate who craved in vain such an intimacy, his sense of being honored by Mrs. Leiter's condescension! To stave off this ordeal as long as possible, I became almost secretive about our acquaintance. When at our meals he would regale me with an amazing variety of information as to Mrs. Charles Leiter's Parisian clothes, tastes in household furnishings, devotion to her husband, indifference to her "in-laws,"

musical education, interest in art, discriminating literary judgment, I wondered what was the source of all this rather accurate information which he managed to acquire.

"Where *do* you find out all this?" I was at last driven to ask him—and to my surprise, he looked a bit embarrassed.

"Oh, I see Dorothy now and then."

"Dorothy Renzheimer? You call her 'Dorothy'? Dear me, so chummy as that? And yet she has never called on me!"

"You know why."

"I am afraid I do."

He shrugged and turned to his food. My ideas on the subject were not important to him. Yet he did look a shade self-conscious; a bit uncomfortable.

"They say," he continued after a moment, "that Mrs. Charles Leiter comes from an old Boston family with distinguished traditions behind them. And indeed I recognized as soon as I met her that she's true blue."

"Do you think (as you so often ask *me*) that you are qualified to judge?"

"Judge of what?"

"You lost out, you know, in your guess about that young scientist at the Academy who turned out to be the son of Bishop Bradley; and I've known other instances—"

"Any one might have been mistaken about Bradley. Don't try to discuss things you don't understand," he answered in a bored tone, as he might have reproved a tiresome child.

"Mr. Appleton was not mistaken about Bradley."

"And you think him, I suppose, more qualified than I to judge of good breeding?" he asked jealously.

"In Bradley's case he was."

"Well, he *should* be, when you consider his background, but it happens that he is not!—surrounding himself with the riff-raff of Leitersville, giving the vulgar, unwashed rabble of the town the run of his home, preferring such society to the best here! He is not fastidious. It may be foolish," he added, complacently smiling, "but as I remarked at Mrs. Baumgardner's dinner last night, it does make a difference to me to know that a man or woman lives south of Market street in Philadelphia!"

"I heard you proclaim your sensitiveness to that distinction and—Eugene, you really must stop saying such things!"

"Indeed? You don't tell me! 'Must?'" He looked amused. "And why, pray?"

"Because you make yourself ridiculous!"

He colored with resentment. "Everybody doesn't happen to know my early background as you do," he coldly reminded me.

"But that is not what I mean! I mean that people of breeding don't say such things. They don't think them."

"And how, pray, did you come by your intimate knowledge of what 'people of breeding' say and think?—the only people of class you have ever known being those you have met through *me*—and those few evidently not finding you their kind! Everybody that is anybody, Nancy, knows that there is an absolute line drawn, socially, between the south and north side of Market street, Philadelphia."

"But it is not the people on the south side, Eugene, that keep talking and thinking of that line."

"Will you tell me where you imbibed your quite uncanny familiarity with the private thoughts and feelings of those who live south of Market street?"

"I can only judge them by myself—"

"Which means you know nothing at all about them."

"Even less than you do?"

He darted a keen glance at me across the table; a shade of perplexity in his eyes over this new spirit he was finding in me. How short time ago I had been all worshipful humility before a god!

"Being pregnant doesn't seem to improve your disposition!" he remarked indifferently.

The most hopeless thing about him was that he saw no other reason than that for the change he was finding in me.

CHAPTER XV

“**Y**OU are so different, Nancy, from what I had been led to suppose!”

“Who had led you to ‘suppose’ anything about me, Edith?”

Mrs. Charles Leiter and I, having gotten a little chilled from motoring, were having hot chocolate and toast in my living room, which my trim, capable Addie had brought to us on a dainty, tempting tray. It was four o’clock in the afternoon and Eugene was due at home about five. I hoped that a perverse fate would not to-day bring him home earlier than usual; I shrank from witnessing the struggle he would have with himself to curb his inclination to fawn upon Mrs. Charles Leiter; for he was of course far too subtle not to cloak, under a dignified reserve, his secret sense of inferiority to those he called “people of class.”

It was his habit to go, immediately upon his return home, to his study on the first floor and shut himself in there to read, write and smoke until dinner time; but if he should recognize Mrs. Leiter’s car and liveried chauffeur at our door, it would certainly bring him in glad surprise and curiosity upstairs to investigate. This I earnestly hoped would not happen.

In view of Leitersville’s attitude towards Mrs. Leiter, I had been surprised and a little amused to find her modest almost to shyness. Yet one felt a forceful personality underneath her quiet, gentle reserve; and just as soon as she found herself in vital touch with me, that reserve dissolved in a spontaneous giving of her best that

made for both of us an exciting spiritual adventure.

She was girlish looking, tall and slim, with a creamy, colorless skin, soft dark eyes and very black hair arranged with a severe simplicity that only such exquisitely regular features as hers could have borne. The expression of her face was meditative, detached, yet warm and human.

"I don't know how you have managed, Nancy, to give my relatives, here, the impression that you are a plain, simple girl from a village, not quite up to Leitersville standards!"

"But that is what I am."

"Yes?" she mocked me, her eyes resting thoughtfully on the Sheffield plate and Doulton china on the tea table.

"I *am* plain and simple, I did come from a village, and Leitersville standards are utterly beyond me."

"I'm beginning to scent a mystery about you!" she said, her glance moving to my mother's portrait over my desk.

I was surprised to find that I did not quail before the menace in this suggestion as a few months ago I would have done. Did that mean that my spirit was escaping from its bondage to fear?—fear of a shame that was not mine, but another's.

"Of course," Edith continued smiling, "as soon as Dr. Appleton told me that you and he had become quite close friends, I knew you were not what the Renzheimers reported you to be."

"I didn't dream the Renzheimers were enough interested in me to 'report' on me. Here's the second volume of *The Growth of the Soil*, you can take it, I've finished it. There never was another novel that could be so utterly absorbing about nothing!"

"I assure you, my dear, you are almost the sole topic of conversation at the Renzheimers'."

"But they barely know me. More chocolate?"

"Yes, thank you. Of course I knew before I met you that a girl that could win two such men as Dr. Curry and Dr. Herrick Appleton was some one to be reckoned with! And sure enough, I find you the only very interesting and lovely thing I have ever discovered in Leitersville, except Dr. Appleton."

I noticed she did not also except Eugene.

"Herrick is 'interesting' of course—but 'a lovely thing'?" I questioned.

"Well, isn't he?"

"Well—yes," I admitted.

"He says he is coming to your dinner party next Thursday."

"Yes."

"You do have a pull with him, Nancy, when you can get him to a Leitersville dinner party!"

"I hope he'll behave himself and keep within bounds. I wouldn't care, only Eugene seems so concerned—"

"For fear Dr. Appleton won't behave?"

"He doesn't know I have invited Dr. Appleton. It will rather upset him when he finds him among the guests! I mean that Eugene is anxious for this party to go smoothly without friction—"

I stumbled a bit in my effort to elude the vulgar truth as to what Eugene was anxious about.

"If he doesn't know that Dr. Appleton is coming, where else does he fear friction?" Edith persisted. "Not between you and your guests?"

"He's never quite sure of me, poor man! He thinks I'm rather undiplomatic. And as for his sister, Mrs.

Klam," I added to divert the talk from Eugene, "she's simply cold with apprehension when she finds herself and me in the same group!"

Edith laughed, showing her dazzling white, even teeth. "But this is a new phase of Dr. Curry I'm learning about! I know him only as the well-beloved teacher and Head Master, the eloquent lecturer, the spiritually-minded thinker. But a man so concerned about a Leitersville dinner going smoothly that his wife conceals from him the fact that she has invited the only other worth-while man in the town except Charles! Why don't you invite *us*, Nancy?"

"You wouldn't come, would you?"

"Not unless we were invited. We're like my colored cook who says she wouldn't go to a party she wasn't invited to if she never got anywhere."

"But I'm told you and Charles don't go to Leitersville parties. I'm sure I don't see why any one would if they didn't have to."

"No party could be dull where you and Dr. Curry and Dr. Appleton and Charles and I were! Yes, thank you, we accept with pleasure. Put me beside Dr. Appleton, will you?"

"Yes. He made me swear a solemn oath I would put him beside me, but he didn't know you'd be there."

"You can put him between us."

"My dear, Leitersville will expect me to give *you* the place of honor on my husband's right."

"That's just why I wouldn't do it if I were you."

"Eugene would think me ignorant and stupid if I didn't."

"He is not so ignorant and stupid himself as to think you could ever be so and he is not in the least interested in me."

I said to myself, "Oh, isn't he! Much you know!"

Aloud I answered, "Of course Eugene is interested in a woman like you!"

"That was my own high opinion of him, my dear, until I learned, last winter, of his interest in Charles' niece, Dorothy Renzheimer, and I knew no man could be interested in me who found her even tolerable! It gave me quite a new angle on Dr. Curry. What puzzles me is how a man capable of loving you could ever have even imagined himself in love with Dorothy!"

"Did he ever imagine himself in love with Dorothy?"

"Well, didn't he? Oh!" she exclaimed in alarm, "I'm not giving anything away, am I? You surely know all about that ancient history?"

"Did it go so far," I asked in a steady, even tone, "as an engagement?"

"Yes, dear, it did—though I wouldn't blame any man for jilting Dorothy to marry you. But, Nancy, didn't you *know*? I should not have dreamed of mentioning it if I had not supposed you knew! I don't crave the rôle of home-wrecker!"

"Did I know that Eugene jilted Dorothy Renzheimer to marry me? But, Edith, he couldn't have, for he and I were engaged before he ever met Miss Renzheimer. I remember his telling me of his first meeting her when she came home from boarding school and made her *début*."

My heart was thumping alarmingly and the life in my womb stirred. I must control my agitation, or harm would come to my baby!

"Naturally *you* know the truth about it all," said Edith, looking distressed, "and no doubt Dorothy exaggerated her side of it. One reason why I've invited myself to your dinner, my dear, is that my relatives-in-law

won't be there! My chief reason for dodging Leitersville parties is my omnipresent and very embarrassing relatives by marriage."

While she chatted about her husband's people and I answered her vaguely, the thought kept beating like a hammer in my brain that I had forced Eugene to marry me when probably he would not otherwise have done so. I suddenly realized that I had been dodging that conviction ever since my marriage. What had held me back from admitting it had been, in the first place, my high ideal of my husband which had made that suspicion seem impossible; and, in the second place, my pride which shrank from facing such a humiliating truth. If it really were the truth, didn't I owe him every reparation possible? But at the time of our marriage we had been betrothed a year and eight months—how, then, could I owe him any reparation? On the contrary, had he not broken faith with me in his relations with Dorothy Renzheimer? No wonder the Renzheimers did not call to see me! But if Eugene had jilted Dorothy, why were the Renzheimers friendly to him and not to me?

"If Miss Renzheimer says Eugene jilted her," I suddenly broke into Edith's monologue, "why is she so friendly with him?"

"But she thinks—well, I believe the family exonerates him from any blame. So of course he wasn't blameworthy and *you* need not be disturbed. If I have upset you, Nancy, I shall never forgive myself!"

"I knew that there had been something between Eugene and your niece—but an *engagement!*"

And then quite suddenly I knew that this ugly revelation did not really matter to me at all. A blank indifference followed my agitation. I felt the color steal

back into my face and my heart subside to its normal beat.

"I just couldn't work up a tragic romance about a girl like Dorothy Renzheimer," I said.

"Romance and *avoirdufois* are rather incompatible—though some types of men do find Dorothy irresistible," said Edith.

A momentary silence fell between us. It was broken by a little rippling laugh from Edith. "If Dorothy and her mother could know how entirely unimpressed you are, Nancy, by their not taking you up, as they put it, when they imagine that you are eating your heart out over it!"

"Why should they imagine that?" I asked rather absently.

"Because they have a monstrous idea of their own importance in Leitersville. You know, Nancy, what makes you so interesting, not to say exciting," she said, looking me over appraisingly, "is that you are not perfectly transparent. You mystify me! You look as though you'd lived a lot more than one usually has at your age. As if you'd had a story in your life. Always after a visit with you, I feel as if I had been pulled up short at an exciting point in a serial! There are dozens of questions I'd like to ask you that I don't dare to. I was so curious about you after two or three visits with you that I tried to sound Dr. Appleton; I asked him what he knew about you and he answered, 'Whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report.'"

I felt my cheeks suddenly aglow. "He is the dearest friend to me!" I said fervently, tears starting to my eyes, a reaction, I suppose, from the shock I had just had.

"So staunch a friend that he quite evaded my prying curiosity. Oh, yes, Nancy, I pried! Asked him the

most personal questions! And all he would say was that he, too, had often wondered those very same things about you. Of course I knew he was bluffing. I think he does know all about your Dark Past! Have you a Dark Past?"

"Do I look as if I had? What a feverish imagination you have, Edith!"

"Look here, Nancy, if you go and tell your husband that I said he jilted Charles' niece and then I have to sit next to him at your dinner—"

"I shall not tell him. At least—not yet."

"You are wise to consider it unimportant. Charles was awfully in love with his stepsister before he met me. It can't matter to you *now*."

"No—not now."

CHAPTER XVI

AS the day for our dinner party drew near, Eugene's nervous apprehension was reflected in an irritability which vented itself upon me in a way that was another revelation to me of his chameleon-like character. Several times he was actually rough and almost abusive. Because our household, unlike Lottie's for days before she gave a party, was not in a turmoil of preparation; because our domestic routine went on as usual up to the very afternoon of the day and Eugene never found me disheveled and worn out, but placid and apparently doing nothing towards the great event, he was sure our party was going to be the worst fiasco the town had ever known; he was going to be horribly mortified; I was lazy and selfish, indifferent to his success—

When I asked him, in some bewilderment, why he made such a fuss about a simple little dinner, he became violent. He didn't want a "simple little dinner!" He wanted "a first class dinner!" If I thought there was nothing to make a fuss about, it was because I knew nothing about "getting up a dinner," in spite of all the very elaborate ones I had attended since he had brought me to Leitersville. I had not attended *one* "simple little dinner." Gorgeous and sumptuous, every one of them. Yet I talked about giving his friends "a simple little dinner!" He angrily insisted that I *must* stir myself and attend to this thing. He was sorry, indeed, that he had ever been so rash as to think of asking one "so socially inexperienced" as I was, to try to entertain his friends. He should have known better. But since we *were* in for it, since invita-

tions had already been given, I simply *must* pull myself together.

Just once I tried to reassure him—as one might humor the vagaries of a sick child—telling him there was nothing to worry about; that Addie and I would do all that was necessary and that the dinner was going to be very nice.

“‘Nice’! ‘Nice’!” he fairly choked over the word. “I don’t want a ‘nice’ meal! I want it to be rich and elegant! And it can’t even be nice, if you won’t exert yourself and get to work!”

In that week before the dinner, I grew to dread the sound of his step coming into the house.

Lottie was scarcely less trying to me with her freely offered advice, her prying curiosity as to the guest list, the menu, what linens, china and silver I would use, what I would wear, what “extra help,” if any, I would employ. She became as agitated as Eugene at my apparent indifference and lethargy.

The fact was, my part in the preparations occupied me about two hours. It consisted in writing out a menu, ordering the food and flowers, telling Addie, in a twenty minutes talk, just what I wanted, engaging the two Academy men servants whom Addie contracted to put through their paces (“Gimme them two boobs fur just a couple of hours the day before the dinner and I’ll have ’em trained to serve you like sich old family retainers or whatever!” she assured me), doling out the silver, linens and china, helping to set the table and arrange the flowers.

On the day of the dinner it happened that a meeting of the Academy trustees detained Eugene at his office until six o’clock, so that when he reached home, he had only time to bathe and dress before our guests began to arrive.

The Klams were the first to come, entering as they always did, by the back door, “so as to save walking over

your hard wood floors in the front hall," Lottie frequently pointed out to me. "I never leave Florence or El come in *our* front way. I keep my front porch that clean, you could eat off of it."

She explained, just now, the reason for her early arrival. "We ran over a little ahead of time to help Eugene receive the folks whilst you help Addie dish up."

"Thank you, but that won't be necessary," I smiled.

"But you can't trust that young thing to do it all by herself, Nancy!"

"She has the two Academy men to help her."

"Good gracious! Two *men*! That's awfully extravagant! Does Eugene know you've hired two men? What do you have to pay them?"

I turned away without answering her, for at that moment Eugene appeared.

"Did *you* know, Brother," Lottie instantly greeted him, "that Nancy's hired *two men* as extra help?"

"Sh—sh!" I whispered, "some people are coming!"

Lottie's eyes bulged as she now saw one of the "extra help," a Negro in a hired livery, at the parlor door announcing, "Mr. and Mrs. Boldosser." This was Addie's doing. I myself would not have attempted to "put over" upon Leitersville anything so ceremonious. Eugene, I noticed as I greeted the Boldossers, was scarcely less surprised than his sister at sight of this improvised butler. The fact was, I was a little surprised myself. I had not known just what Addie would be up to, when she said, "Leave them two boobs to me," but I had known that I could trust her experience to do nothing ridiculous.

Among our guests were several influential trustees of the Academy and their wives who, according to Eugene's standards, lived on such a grand scale that his responsibility in being their host made him rather self-conscious

and flurried. I caught him, once or twice, regarding with some wonder my unperturbed ease in receiving these people. However surprisingly unembarrassed I might be at other people's parties, it was incredible that my heavy responsibilities as hostess to such guests as these whose style of entertaining I could never hope to rival, should find me calm.

But the butler announcing our guests at the parlor door did much to give Eugene a sense of assurance and composure. I was relieved to see that he approved of Addie's idea of a butler.

To avoid friction I had not told him that Herrick was coming; and to avoid explanations and an increase of his nervous apprehensions, I had also kept it to myself that Mr. and Mrs. Charles Leiter would be among our guests.

When Herrick appeared Eugene scarcely concealed his annoyance. He knew that the trustees who were with us would almost as soon have dined with Eugene Debs or Emma Goldman.

When at nearly seven o'clock Lottie thought that every one had come she whispered to me, "I'll go out now and tell your hired girl to dish up."

"No, no, Addie knows what she has to do," I checked her.

"You hadn't ought to trust her that far. I'd better go out and see she does it right."

"If you do, Addie will walk out of the house!"

"You've got her spoiled. A person that is not used to hired help don't know how to keep them in their place. You leave her take advantage."

I turned away from her to speak to Mrs. Diener's social secretary whom, against Eugene's advice, I had insisted upon inviting with the Diener's because I had found her much more worth knowing than they were.

But in a moment Lottie was at me again. "I'll get the folks started to the dining-room for you. I know how to do it—"

"Don't you see, Lottie, we're playing we keep a butler? Let *him* announce dinner."

She looked at me as who should say, "For such as you to presume to have a butler is mocking at Divine Providence!"

When at that moment our theatric lackey announced "Mr. and Mrs. Charles Leiter," I felt the electric tremor that went over the company, saw the startled curiosity of the women, saw Lottie and Elmer quickly seek each other's eyes in bewilderment, and met, with no change of expression in my own face, Eugene's glance turned upon me in mingled uncertainty and excitement. The uncertainty was of my sanity, I was sure; he thought, for the moment, that I had invited them without having ever met them. But he was reassured on this point when Edith, taking my hand, laid it against her cheek, then kissed it before she dropped it to shake hands perfunctorily with Eugene, scarcely looking at him.

"Go and talk to Dr. Appleton, Edith," I said, giving her a little push, that was half a caress, towards Herrick who, alone in a corner, was looking rather more than unusually satirical as he surveyed us all.

Eugene's astonishment and Lottie's awed wonder in witnessing these little familiar interchanges afforded me a passing amusement.

The rented butler now announced dinner "like an old family retainer," or like Addie's idea of such a functionary. I led the way with Mr. Charles Leiter, having surreptitiously directed Eugene to take out Mrs. Leiter.

I had not attempted, in planning this dinner, to com-

pete with the skill of Leitersville hostesses in devising all sorts of fancy frills culled from household magazines. But as we entered the dining-room, I seemed to see with the eyes of my guests that the candle-lit table gleaming with the silver, damask, china and glass from my old home, was yet so exquisitely simple as compared with Leitersville elaborateness that its distinction was impressive.

When I saw how it caught Eugene quite unprepared, astonished and confused him, so that he was momentarily embarrassed, I regretted that I had not let him have a look at it beforehand.

However, he quickly recovered and got himself in hand, disguising to every one but me his pride and delight in this daintily appointed feast where he sat as host.

In his assiduous attentions to Mrs. Leiter at his side, he was in danger of forgetting that he *was* the host, and for a time he scarcely noticed his other guests, somewhat to my mortification; for it was worse than tactless; it was raw. Indeed, the table talk seemed at first to be quite monopolized by the Leiters, Herrick and Eugene, while the others merely listened, the women rendered a little stiff and self-conscious by the impressive presence of simple, modest Mrs. Leiter, and the men unequal to the "high-brow" conversation tossed about by the PH.D's and the traveled, well-read Leiters.

They discussed world politics, Charles Leiter mildly opposing Herrick's radicalism, Eugene being safely neutral, and Edith remarking, "I've lived in so many countries that I am quite too internationally-minded to be very patriotic. I would give allegiance to causes and ideals rather than to a nation."

"If you had said that a few years ago, you would now be in Leavenworth Prison instead of at this festive

board," said Herrick. "Twenty years' sentences in the United States of America for being internationally-minded!"

"Yes," spoke in Mr. Finch, one of the trustees, with a sinister glance at Herrick, "we did it thoroughly here; as we are going to do it, too, with our peace-time traitors, our preachers of sedition against our government!"

"Sedition, for instance, against our national institution of Prohibition?" smiled Herrick; "the traitors of *our* class—not Reds! Well," he added, "seeing that it's the people who think as *you* do who have gotten the world into its present mess of universal strife and hatred and want, why, in God's name, do you consider that *your* way of managing affairs ought to be preserved—preserved even at the cost of imprisoning and lynching all who object to it?"

"Whatever the faults of the present order," maintained the trustee, "it is better than the red-rag insanity of Bolshevism! Our American Legion and our Ku Klux Klan will take care of you Bolsheviks!"

"If your class were wise, you would see that concession, not opposition, is your only chance of escape," replied Herrick without emotion.

"Escape from what?"

"From the growing world-consciousness of the absurdity of our social order."

"Do you mean to say, Dr. Appleton, that you don't consider our American Ideal the highest ideal in the world?" demanded the trustee aggressively.

"But what is it—the American Ideal? Please tell me."

The trustee stared, grew red, stammered, and finally broke out, "Now you've got me stumped! I don't know!"

"This talk about social justice," said Charles Leiter

cynically, "there's no such thing as justice in nature or in man!"

"Oh, but surely there is, my friend," Eugene's smooth voice here spoke in placatingly, "else we'd not have the high *ideal* of justice in our souls that most of us do have. Our ideals are the shadows of the great Reality."

There was an instant's impressive silence at this. Herrick looked at me and I quickly averted my eyes in terror lest he should wink, he looked so much as if he were going to!

"There's our ideal of marriage," added Eugene with a dramatically conjugal glance across the table at me. "It is so rarely realized, yet some of us know, from our own blessed experiences, that it *can* be; that marriage is indeed ordained of God."

"It is love, not marriage, that is ordained of God," spoke Edith's shy, gentle voice.

"Marriage," said the trustee who was a lawyer, "is a mere civil contract ordained of man."

"Ordained of the devil!" Herrick corrected him; and Lottie started and gasped.

Edith was too sensitive not to feel, presently, how the other women at the table were held in a thrall of silence by the little dominating group that centered about her. Very tactfully, almost imperceptibly, she swung the talk to include them; I abetting her as well as I could from my end of the room. It did not take her long to break down their stiffness, she was so entirely genuine and unpretentious. I think they were surprised to find themselves perfectly at ease and quite self-forgetful with her as they talked of their clubs, their dressmakers, their servants, their churches.

Only Lottie and Elmer, among them all, found her "snobby," as Elmer told me next day. When Lottie

bragged about her model rearing of her child and her exemplary housekeeping, Edith quietly, but quite ruthlessly changed the subject. And when Elmer related his favorite story of how he had asserted his American free-and-equalism by refusing to make way for the President of the United States, she was frankly unimpressed and inattentive.

"To be sure, I would not have you think," Elmer pleaded for at least her approval, if not her admiration, "that I'm not patter-otic. There's none more so! It's only that I never did and never will step aside for any one, be he whom he may!"

"Yes, El always was like that," said Lottie as usual. "He always did say right out what he thinks to any one, be he whom he may. He never would stand back for any one or any—"

Eugene glanced at me desperately.

"Oh, Lottie," I broke in, "what have you done with Florence to-night?"

"She is spending the night with Mary Kellog at the Manse and I am so anxious for fear Mary will lead her into some naughtiness! But I did not know what else to do with her."

"You certainly ran a risk, turning her loose in Mary's hands!"

"Is 'Mary' the proverbial scapegrace of the minister's family?" asked Edith.

"You must know Mary, Edith! She's a desperate character. One of those dear delightful children that simply can't be standardized!"

"How interesting! I always did prefer the company of criminals and bums to that of 'standardized' people!"

"I didn't know you were in the habit of consorting with criminals and bums, my dear!" her husband grinned.

"Not so much as I'd like to."

The blank faces about the table indicated how unintelligible were these astonishing sentiments.

"Mary tells Florence such awful untruths!" complained Lottie. "Long stories made up out of her head and not a word of truth *in* them, about things that she says happened to her that *couldn't* happen, they would be impossible! I am so afraid it will teach Florence to be untruthful!"

"No danger, Florence hasn't enough imagination," I consoled her.

"Thank you, Nancy, for the compliment to my little Florence. I am sure I am glad you think so. Imagination like Mary's is certainly a dreadful fault! It's really immaur'l!"

"Nancy, when will you bring this dangerous child to see me?" asked Edith.

"I'll bring her up to lunch with you to-morrow, shall I?"

"Oh, do!"

At every sign like this of the easy footing on which Edith and I stood to each other, Lottie, Elmer and Eugene looked more and more puzzled and curious. But Lottie, just now, looked also very resentfully jealous at my choosing another than her child for the distinction of lunching at Leiter's Hill; this was a slight which I saw she would not soon forgive.

As the dinner progressed, I realized that Addie, a natural genius at cooking, was surpassing herself to-night and I guessed that she was on her mettle to show Eugene how groundless had been his fears of the past week; for of course she had frequently overheard him railing at me about this dinner, and she had been perfectly aware of his apprehension of a "fiasco." Prob-

ably she realized that, from her ten years' experience in luxurious city homes, she knew far more about serving a dinner than Dr. Curry knew.

Eugene looked aglow with satisfaction; his glances across the table at me seemed gratefully to embrace me and humbly to apologize to me—even while they doubted, suspected and puzzled over me.

The only bitter dregs in his full cup of contentment were the persistent efforts of Elmer to take the center of the stage. I think that never until to-night when, for the first time, Eugene saw his brother-in-law through others' eyes, had he realized him to be the funny little cocky rooster that he was, with his strutting self-importance, his ignorance, his twisted English—"It reads in the paper that Mr. Frey's house burned down by unknown origin." "Ex-President Taft ain't built nice and neat for a big man; he's built awful sloppy." "My little Florence is so nice-complected, but she got tanned so unmerciful at Atlantic City last summer, I'm not taking her there again." "I don't care if a woman don't dress just to say so stylish, but very neat."

When some one recommended to Lottie, Lamb's *Tales*, for Florence, Elmer said, eager to show off his familiarity with literature, "'Lamb's Tales' for Florence? Oh yes, Little Bo-Peep. You mean Sheep's Tails. There's another nice book about an animal—a horse—*Black Beauty*. A very nice, clean story."

Paris was mentioned and Elmer was ready with his opinion of that great city, which he pronounced, "Parse." "It's a very immaurl city—so considered. I am satisfied the world could do without Parse!"

Some one asked Herrick about his new book, and when he had briefly replied, Elmer spoke up with bravado. "I could write a book, I know I could if I half tried; for

I'm a very good penman and a good spellar; and I've a good command over language. And ideas? I've more ideas than I know what to do with! Full of 'em. And I'm free to say that there's no one, the round globe over, that understands humanity the way I do!"

Eugene suffered.

In the parlor after dinner, Edith's gentle efforts to extricate herself from Lottie's unyielding determination to keep close to her, both amused and troubled me. I could see that Lottie thought that if *I* had found Mrs. Leiter such easy game, it would be downhill grade for *her* to ingratiate herself at Leiter's Hill. When I hovered near them to rescue Edith if I could, I found that Lottie was using her daughter as an opening wedge.

"If you are fond of children, Mrs. Leiter, you will find my little Florence so much better behaved and trained than poor little Mary Kellog that's been so unfortunate as to be motherless and has grown up so wild and ungovernable that it is really very sa-ad! Reverend Kellog might do more with her than he does, it seems to me; he hardly ever corrects her when she behaves improperly. Why, Mrs. Leiter, he leaves her run in and out of those common homes in the alley behind the Manse and the things she picks up in those places! She told Florence the other day how she said to Jake Snyder, a tough that lives in one of those poor, dirty houses, that if he swore he'd go to hell, and that Jake Snyder had answered, 'But I *own* hell, kiddo; my wife gave it to me last night!' Now, just imagine, Mrs. Leiter, as clean-minded a child as my little Florence hearing such language as that! I punished her severely when she repeated it to me! And I made her wrench her mouth out with soap!"

"'Wrench her mouth out!'" repeated Edith, aghast.

"Oh, you mean rinse it out? But soap taken internally is so unsanitary, Mrs. Klam!"

"Well, to be sure, I didn't put much in the wrench water. Just enough to teach her, you understand."

"To teach her to hide from you things Mary tells her? Isn't it safer that you should know them?"

"But I've got to teach her not to listen to Mary and not to repeat such language. I'm a mother this way, Mrs. Leiter—"

At this point I broke in and bore Edith across the room to Mrs. Diener's secretary, whom I knew she would like.

It was not long, however, before Lottie was again hovering near her and I overheard her saying, "If Nancy does take Mary up to your place to lunch, Mrs. Leiter, I don't think you'll like it for your hired girls to hear the way that child talks! But you'd never need have any fear of my little Florence before your girls. She's been too well raised! Well, I guess!"

"But you know, Mrs. Klam, really I'm not sure which I think worse for a child—too much rearing or too little. Overtraining makes a child so artificial. And surely what makes children fascinating to us is their genuineness and unself-consciousness. We are never so honest, you know, after we are grown. If we curb all the natural impulses of a child—especially its dear, delightful bad impulses—"

"Oh, but my little girl hasn't any bad impulses, the way Mary Kellog has, that's been left run so wild! I guard and train Florence too carefully to leave any bad impulses come into her little mind, though I admit she has now and then been led to follow Mary Kellog's bad impulses. However," smiled Lottie confidently, "you only have to

see those two children, Mary and Florence, together, Mrs. Leiter, and compare their manners, to know which one is the nicest and better behaved child! If you would like me to bring Florence up to see you some time, I'd be only too glad to."

"Why, that would be very nice. But I am afraid my influence on her would interfere with all that complete and thorough training you give her. I am sure it would not be at all what you would approve."

"I shan't be afraid, Mrs. Leiter, to have Florence copy *your* manners—as genteel as what you are!"

"But I understand you don't like her Aunt Nancy's influence over her and mine would be, oh, much worse!"

"Did Nancy tell you that? Nancy!" Lottie turned to me, "if you want to talk about me, I wish you'd do it to my face and not behind my back! Of course I don't think, Mrs. Leiter, that Nancy's influence on Florence is for the best. She certainly does not teach her to honor her father and her mother—"

"—that her days may be long upon the land," I broke in. "Mary Kellog told me one day that she intended always to 'dishonor' her father on Sundays, so that the day would not be so awfully 'long upon the land'! You see, her father thinks he is making her remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy, when he is only making her blaspheme it."

"Nancy!" breathed my scandalized sister-in-law. "Now you see for yourself, Mrs. Leiter," she added sadly, "why I darsent leave Florence be around her Aunt Nancy!"

"Then I am afraid you would not dare trust her to me, Mrs. Klam!"

"Oh, but you must not be so modest, my dear!" smiled Lottie, patting Edith's hand. "You are not a bit like

Nancy. Why, one day Nancy ak-shally *swore* in my child's presence! You need not deny it, Nancy, my dear. You know you swore! I'm sure, Mrs. Leiter *you* would not swear before a little, pure, innocent child! Oh, I guess you don't half know our Nancy! She just does what she pleases, regardless! Even *my brother*," in a tone of awe, "can't stop her. You know you don't stop for what Eugene says, Nancy!"

"Stop what?"

"Anything you want to do! I'll be awfully glad, Mrs. Leiter, to have you know my little daughter. It would be such an advantage to her to see your kind of a home and to learn whilst she's young what's what and how folks live that *are* somebody, so's she'll know what's what and won't feel awkward when she meets up with other folks that have more than what she's always had. It isn't, any way, what you have, I always say; it's what you are; don't you think so, Mrs. Leiter?"

"I find it is largely what you have, Mrs. Klam. If I lived in the alley back of the Manse, you know, I should not be permitted the pleasure of visits from your carefully guarded little daughter. My dear," added Edith, turning to me, "what a lovely girl Miss Burr is! She seems rather an exotic in Leitersville. I would like to know her better. Will you take me to call on her?"

"Love to!"

"Oh, but, Nancy, you can't!" interposed Lottie. "That's just like you!—not explaining to Mrs. Leiter who Miss Burr *is*! Imagine your taking Mrs. Leiter to call on *her*! Why, Mrs. Leiter, Miss Burr is little more than a servant! Mrs. Diener don't treat her much different any way. She's just Mrs. Diener's hired companion—and Nancy would sooner make a friend of her than she would of Mrs. Deiner herself! Leave any one

take Nancy's fancy and she never stops to ask who or what they are or to consider my brother's position here in Leitersville which really makes it necessary that she should be a little particular who she makes her friends; don't you think so, Mrs. Leiter?"

"But since she has been so gracious as to make *me* her friend, I can't find it in my heart to criticise her methods."

"Well, *you*, that's another matter! But it's a good thing I was by just now to tell you who Miss Burr *is*—for Nancy would never have told you. She would just have taken you to call on her like you asked her to and you would never have known till you got there. I must say, Nancy, I think if you want to make *yourself* cheap with folks like Miss Burr, you needn't drag in others!"

"But I shall gladly be 'dragged' to see Miss Burr!" smiled Edith, laying her hand on my arm and starting to lead me away. Lottie, however, detaining her by suddenly assuming a kittenishly playful air, that in one of her portly build was distressing, said, "Oh, well, then, I hope, Mrs. Leiter, Nancy will 'drag' you to see me some time. Will you, Nancy?"

Edith murmured a perfunctory reply for us both.

"Excuse me for not asking you sooner," Lottie continued, "but I understood you didn't make calls in Leitersville, or go to parties. That is what folks here say about you and it just goes to show how you can't believe what you hear, don't it?"

"But it's quite true. I come to Leitersville for rest and quiet, to get away from people a bit and from the rush of the city."

"Then how on earth did Nancy manage to coax you here to-night? We didn't have an *idea* you were to be here! We didn't even know Nancy had made your ac-

quaintance. She never told us! Did Eugene know, Nancy? He didn't tell *us*!"

"Tell you what?"

"That you had met Mrs. Leiter and had invited her to your party?"

"But I didn't invite her. You see, Lottie, it was like this—she heard that I was giving a dinner and that I had an awfully good cook, so she hinted around to be asked; didn't you, Edith?—I discouraged her all I could; but she kept on hinting, so what could I do?"

Lottie, looking bewildered and embarrassed at such coarse joking about a thing so sacred as Mrs. Leiter's presence here, stared at me incredulously.

"I'm glad I did fish for an invitation, Nancy. Your chef is a prize. Also, seeing you in the bosom of your family makes you more than ever a fascinatingly baffling enigma!"

Here Edith resolutely drew me away with a suddenly assumed air of dignity that halted even Lottie's brazen determination.

CHAPTER XVII

LOTTIE would have lingered after the guests had departed, to satisfy her curiosity about my acquaintance with Edith and to call me to account for having planned to take Mary Kellog, rather than Florence to lunch at Leiter's Hill. But I eluded her by fleeing at once to my bed-room and locking the door.

Having a very determined character, however, she was not to be so easily balked. She followed me up to my room and knocked firmly upon the locked door.

"What is it?" I called.

"I want to speak with you, Nancy—please—may I?"

I detected a new note in her maner of addressing me; a shade less of arrogance; a bit of uncertainty.

"But I'm undressing. Dead tired, Lottie! *Must* get right to bed."

"I can talk whilst you undress—"

"No—please—I'm just getting into bed. I must be careful for the baby, you know—"

"Hsh—sh! Eugene's coming up!" she modestly whispered through the key hole.

"I assure you it's *his* baby, Lottie! Good-night."

"Can't you open your door for just a minute?"

"Not for a second. Good-night."

I switched off the light and continued my undressing in the dark until I heard her go slowly away.

I was sitting up in bed reading when Eugene presently came to me. Knowing he surely would come, I had unlocked the door upon Lottie's departure.

"Well!" he exclaimed, putting his arm about my shoul-

ders and pressing me to him, "I think we may congratulate ourselves! Even the Leiters could not criticise *that* dinner, my dear! How you ever did it! Where on earth did you learn so much? For it was better in every way than any Leitersville dinner I've ever seen! You sly child!" pinching my ear, "you must have been spending all your spare time reading up in the home magazines how to do it. It really was most creditable. Now, then," he demanded, seating himself, facing me, on the side of the bed, "*how* did you come to know Mrs. Charles Leiter so well? And why didn't you tell me she and her husband were coming this evening? It nearly bowled me over!—so that I just escaped making an ass of myself!"

"So I noticed!"

"Indeed?" he returned with an ironic lift of his brows, though he eyed me guardedly. "Well? Tell me."

"Dr. Appleton introduced us."

"Where?"

"At his home."

"Is he in the habit of receiving visits at his bachelor quarters from young married ladies?"

"From Mrs. Leiter and me, yes."

"I don't approve of it. However, if you met Mrs. Leiter at Appleton's house, I suppose that's why you had to invite him for to-night when you asked them. It would have looked funny not to. I was awfully annoyed when I found you had asked him, but that makes it excusable, of course. I'm surprised they came! And yet, in a way I understand, for I must hand it to you, Nancy, that you do have a way of holding your head up and keeping cool with *any* class of people—so that Mrs. Leiter might easily mistake you for the real thing, by Jove! One would never suspect, meeting you in society, that the *reason*

you're so at your ease is just because you're so unsophisticated! It makes me laugh!"

"Does it?"

"Never mind," he patted my hand lying on the counterpane, "I was really proud of you to-night! You were quite stunning! And I must admit you're quite a clever little manipulator after all! You've put it all over some of those people that haven't called on you. For all Leitersville will know to-morrow what a spiffy dinner we gave and that the Charles Leiters were here!"

"Yes, I suppose the *Gazette* will feature it! But I'm afraid, Eugene, I had no such clever, sly designs as you are attributing to me. And I had invited Dr. Appleton before I met Mrs. Leiter."

"Oh, you had!" he frowned. "When you knew I didn't want him! Unless," his frown relaxed, "you did it to get him to bring you and Mrs. Leiter together—did you?"

"Oh, Eugene," I turned my head away from him on the pillow, "how ridiculously you don't know the wife of your bosom!"

"The wife of my bosom!" he repeated, bending over me suddenly and kissing me passionately. But I drew away in alarm.

"I'm so tired, Eugene! Please let me go to sleep now. It's bad for the baby, you know, for me to get so tired!"

"Confound the baby! A perfect nuisance!" he grumbled.

"Don't! How can you?"

He muttered something about enduring all the discomforts of a bachelor while bearing all the expenses of a married man.

"Good-night," I said firmly.

"Oh, don't worry! I've got my instructions from the

doctor—I know what I'm up against! How long have you known Mrs. Leiter?"

"Two weeks."

"But why did you make such a secret of it?" he asked irritably.

"It was my own personal affair—"

"But for two weeks while I've been sitting at meals with you talking of that woman, you have never once mentioned that you knew her! And you must have been seeing her pretty often to have gotten to the point of calling her by her Christian name! How often *have* you been seeing her?"

"Every day or two."

"At Appleton's? Or have you called on each other?"

"We've never been so formal as that. We motor and walk together now and then."

"Upon my word! Have you been to Leiter's Hill?"

"Yes."

"More than once?"

"Yes."

"Well, how often?"

"Oh, Eugene, don't be so absurd!" I groaned.

"Absurd? I see nothing absurd in my objecting to your acting secretly and shutting me out—unless," he again suddenly softened, "you were saving up a pleasant little surprise for your beau? Was that it, my dear?"

"Can't you see, Eugene, that Mrs. Leiter is a very simple person—not at all different from me?"

"Not different from you?" He smiled indulgently. "You are 'a very simple person,' certainly, not to see *how* different from you she is! Why, my dear, she has a sister married to an English nobleman; she is constantly traveling all over the world, going with an entrée into the best society everywhere. She and her husband both

have millions. They have a great palace on the Hudson where they entertain wonderfully. Different from you!"

"Well, please let me go to sleep now," I said wearily, "won't you? I'm awfully tired!"

"In a minute. First tell me—what are the damages going to be for all that dinner?" he asked, looking worried. "It was much more elaborate than I expected it to be."

"It was not so bountiful as Leitersville dinners usually are. It was the way it was served that made it seem 'more elaborate.' I'll give you the bills to-morrow."

"We really ought to give Addie a bit of a tip," he surprisingly suggested. "She's a little marvel for such a child! She did all that cooking alone, didn't she?—for Johnson and Gardner can't cook and I didn't see you on the job."

"She did all the cooking, yes."

"Then she deserves a bit extra. Let me see—"

I looked at him in some alarm. If he should hand Addie a quarter, perhaps, to-morrow morning, what would happen?

"She has such big notions," he continued, considering earnestly the size of the fee, "that I don't know just what I dare to—look here, Nancy, do you know sometimes I suspect she's older than she looks, she's so capable! Well," he magnanimously concluded, "I'll offer her fifty cents."

"Better let me give it to her," I said—but at the look of doubt he gave me, I knew he suspected me of a design to defraud Addie and keep the fifty cents.

"What do we have to pay the men?" he inquired uneasily.

"Three dollars apiece."

"Six dollars! Whew! Oh, well, it won't have to be

done again for a year and I am glad it was so successful. I'm very pleased, my dear!"

He rose from the bed, bent over me and kissed me tenderly; then once more he clasped me passionately. But when he felt me rigid and unresponsive in his arms, he as suddenly released me and almost flung himself out of the room.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHAT I went through in the days that followed, trying to elude not only Lottie's curiosity but her determination to share my friendship with the Leiters, it would be tedious to record. She knew it every time Mrs. Leiter's car drove into the Academy grounds and every time Edith and I went together for a walk; she constantly intruded upon us in my sitting-room; she invited herself to join us in our walks or drives. We both steadily, though gently, withstood all her advances; so gently, indeed, that at first she did not realize she was being eluded and thus the agony was prolonged.

"I've never known any one," Edith once remarked of Lottie, "say so many flat things without feeling embarrassed at herself!"

When it finally did dawn upon Lottie that Edith and I, unless we could be alone together, did not care to be together at all, she attributed it to a sinister influence on my part because of my jealous fear lest she should supplant me in Mrs. Leiter's regard. She complained to Eugene that I was deliberately preventing Mrs. Leiter from being "neighborly and friendly" with her.

"She and Nancy are that chummy, they're together every blessed day and yet not once has Nancy brought Mrs. Leiter to call on me or taken me to call at Leiter's Hill! I wish you'd speak to her!"

Eugene did speak to me, but not to urge me to thrust Lottie and Elmer upon the Leiters. He was learning, to his discomfort, that he had erred in judgment in bringing

Elmer, whom he always had considered much less presentable than Lottie, to the Leitersville Academy. He did, however, take me to task for continuing to be so "secretive" about my intimacy with Edith. He seemed to think it a matter that should be reported to him in every detail.

I soon became aware of the fact that Lottie's failure to ingratiate herself with Mrs. Leiter where I had "succeeded," gave her a very surprised new idea of me. There began to appear in her attitude towards me a consideration, even a respect, that almost embarrassed me.

Indeed, it seemed to me that not only Lottie and Elmer, but all Leitersville was reflecting the effect upon it of the honor it felt I enjoyed.

Eugene continued to manifest his surprise and pleasure over what he evidently considered on my part a clever achievement.

"Not such a little green horn as I had supposed!" he would playfully tell me. "For Mrs. Charles Leiter to take you up so unreservedly—"

"No one ever 'takes me up,' Eugene."

"Nonsense, my dear! Recognize facts! We can't pretend to have had her advantages of wealth and travel and social experiences. I think she is very kind indeed to a simple little girl like you, to overlook all your deficiencies as *she* must feel them, and make you her constant companion. Perhaps," he said hopefully, "she will even invite us sometime to her New York home or her house on the Hudson—though of course that is quite another proposition from her taking you up *here*!"

With the exception of the Renzheimers, I found myself now sought by those who supposed they had been snubbing me. However, they were a bit too late with their attentions, for I was coming to the stage in my pregnancy at which I was, to my satisfaction, excusable for declining

all invitations. Edith and Mrs. Diener's social secretary were almost the only people I now saw.

It seemed that Eugene's capacity for astonishing and deeply shocking me was not yet exhausted, for I perceived that my daily increasing helplessness, far from calling forth his compassion, annoyed him. Once when I asked him to execute some shopping commission for me to which, in my condition, I could not attend, he acted as though I had grossly insulted him; it was an indignity to be asked to be my "errand boy."

Right before his eyes, I went to the telephone and asked Herrick to be my errand boy—to which, of course Herrick eagerly consented and I elaborately thanked him. Eugene was so chagrined at this performance that he scarcely spoke to me for two days.

As Leitersville propriety required that I should not be seen by the Academy boys, my enforced imprisonment indoors during the lovely days of May, tried my nerves so sorely, that one evening, feeling desperately restless, I suddenly asked Eugene, "Can't you take me out for a little walk? I *must* have a breath of outdoors! It's quite dark, no one will see me distinctly."

"Where on earth do you want to go?"

"Just for a walk."

"Just walk about? Well, there's the piazza."

"Will you walk with me about the grounds a bit?"

"Why can't you go by yourself?"

"It tires me so! I'd like to hang on your arm."

"You want me to make a fool of myself!" he said in a deep, angry voice that was almost violent.

"How make a fool of yourself?" I asked wonderingly.

"Walking aimlessly around the place! Of course I won't! Ridiculous!"

To this day I have never been able to understand the

psychology of that angry, indignant refusal. Was it the Pennsylvania Dutchman's rebellion against the least subjection to a woman? Or was it a cowardly fear, which he would not admit, lest we meet some of the Academy boys? Whatever it was, his denying me anything I might ask, however "ridiculous," when I was possibly on the brink, if not of death, at least of the great agony that was, for me, the price of our love, has always seemed to me quite amazing.

It was just on the eve of my confinement that I came upon a discovery, quite accidentally, which greatly startled me; how greatly, I did not at the time fully realize; but afterwards, when I looked back, I felt that I must have known (even while frantically shutting my eyes to the knowledge) that from the hour of that startling discovery, the babe in my womb did not stir.

Eugene was subject, at long intervals, to attacks of headache and nausea that would come upon him without warning. One afternoon, about an hour after his return from the Academy, while he was as usual locked into his study until he should be called to dinner, he was seized with one of these attacks and came staggering out into the hall to the foot of the stairs just as I happened to be coming down. His face was deathly white and drawn with pain as he reeled past me on the stairs to go to his bed-room. I quickly followed with the usual remedies and conveniences. And when I had made him as comfortable as was possible under the circumstances and had come down to have my dinner alone, I found that he had left the window in his study wide open and that the wind had blown some of his papers into the hall. Having closed the window, I started to pick up the scattered sheets of paper. It was the engraved paper which he used only for his private, personal correspondence and I vaguely won-

dered to whom he could be writing such a long personal letter as this, which closely covered four sheets. As I laid them on his desk and was about to turn away, my eye was caught by some arresting words—"Dorothy darling"—"a little more patience"—"fate release me"—"trapped me"—

My head reeled. I sank into the nearest chair, the letter in my shaking hand. Mechanically I arranged the sheets as they were numbered, trying to keep my eyes from seeing another word until I should get myself in hand—for my baby's sake—for I was trembling all over.

I had seen enough to know that I must read this letter; that it was my right to know—

After a moment, as my heart grew quieter, I did read it from beginning to end. It was manifestly a reply to an impassioned appeal from Dorothy Renzheimer, for he counseled patience; advised against any rash act which might ruin all their chances for future happiness; suggested that his release from the "trap" into which he had been "tricked" might now be very imminent—

Could he mean because of "the perils of childbirth" in which I now stood? It was the first intimation I had had that he was conscious of my "peril"!

He wrote of his utter devotion to her, the only woman he had "ever really thought of marrying"; of his wife's failure to "meet" him on his "own plane"; of his longing and impatience for the completer union he might have with her who so perfectly understood him—

It all rang so false that I found myself actually bored with reading it, even while feeling intensely shocked and agitated. But I had an intuitive conviction that as a woman (I might almost say as a female) I appealed to Eugene far more than Dorothy Renzheimer did; so much more that I could hardly believe he was very anxious to be

rid of me. Of course I knew by this time that, having had the chance to marry the granddaughter of old Jacob Leiter, he never would have married me if, as he said, he had not been "trapped." But I was sure he never would have ceased to desire and regret me. In short I knew that, in his way, he had been passionately enamored of me—and was yet. Otherwise, he would never have consummated our sick-bed marriage after my recovery, but would have asked me to release him, knowing that I would have done it without protest; that I only had to be told he desired it. His way out at that time would have been so easy compared to the difficulty and publicity it would now involve.

Did this letter mean that what happiness he did find in me he was ready to sacrifice for the greater good of the Renzheimer wealth? Was he actually hoping to escape the scandal of a divorce (which in his position was such a very precarious expedient) through my death in childbed? His letter surely hinted that!

Well, my disillusioning as to my husband had never gone so far as to imagine him capable of this!—counting on my death in his conspiracy with another woman!

If I lived, what, I wondered, would he do with Dorothy Renzheimer?

That night, a little past midnight, I heard him going stealthily downstairs to his study. He had recovered enough to remember his letter and be anxious about it.

All through the next day, whenever he came near me, his furtive and uneasy searching of my face revealed his fear that I might have seen the letter. But although my unchanged bearing told him nothing, he had learned from recent experiences that I had a way of keeping things to myself, and he was far from reassured.

I realized, now, where he spent his evenings away from

me; and where Herrick had probably found him the night they thought I might die.

That week I wrote to my lawyer in New York, who was my cousin, directing him to draw up my will; I provided for Eugene's mother and for my friend, Miss Burr, Mrs. Diener's secretary. I left the bulk of my estate in the trust of Herrick and my cousin for my child if it lived. If it did not live, my estate passed to Herrick to be used in carrying on his work in social education, in aiding all liberal periodicals and in establishing, if possible, a college founded on the principle of free speech.

The silver, china, linens, rugs and furniture that were now in our Academy home, I bequeathed to Mary Kellog.

Of course my lawyer-cousin pointed out to me that a will in which my husband was not even mentioned, would not stand in law; that he could take half of all I had; or, if my child lived, a third.

But I gave him a sealed letter to be opened in case of my death. "You will find here," I wrote him, "a weapon that will force my husband's submission to my will."

It was a copy of the letter to Dorothy Renzheimer which I had found. I did not believe Eugene would ever let that letter be read in a court; or, if his cupidity led him so far, I believed that the court that read that letter would sustain my will.

This matter being concluded, I prepared to leave my husband's house.

Coming home from school one afternoon, Eugene learned from Addie that I had gone to the Leitersville Hospital to stay until after my confinement.

It was not until eight o'clock that evening that he came to see me. His finding Edith with me softened somewhat

the cold displeasure which, at my first glance, I saw in his face. But when she left, which she did immediately, and he took in the several facts that I was not in bed, that I was not in pain, but blooming and serene, that I was alone in a comfortable, private, "single" room, which he knew to be very high-priced, his displeasure returned.

"Why do you do things like this without consulting me?" he coldly demanded. "Coming to this hospital is a wholly unnecessary extravagance! Your confinement would not cost half so much at home. And any way, why are you here before your time? I expected of course to find you in labor—or that the picnic was all over by this time!"

"Yet you waited three hours before coming to me? You didn't even telephone," I quietly reminded him.

"I expected that you or the hospital would telephone to me."

"After it was all over?"

"Well, I wouldn't be of any use, would I, in such a picnic? Look here, Nancy, a confinement costs enough at best, but to recklessly go ahead like this, regardless of expense,—*why* didn't you consult me before arranging to come here?"

"Because I wanted to make sure of expert scientific care—since you objected, you know, to even a trained nurse! I was afraid to trust myself at home!"

"Nonsense! Anyway, a trained nurse at home would not cost what *this* will! I consider this an outrageous presumption, your piling up expenses like this on me without ever consulting me! What *are* the rates?"

"Thirty-five dollars a week. Nurse extra."

"And doctor's bill extra!" he exclaimed in a voice husky with anger. "It's perfectly ridiculous! You had

no right to involve me in this! The idea of the birth of a baby, a perfectly natural function, costing several hundred dollars! It's wholly unnecessary!"

"If you were going to have this baby, wouldn't you want to be as comfortable and as safe as possible?"

"Just as if you couldn't be perfectly comfortable and safe in a home like ours! A far better home than any *you* ever had before! Do you think you do *right* to do these things behind my back?"

"Do you consult me about anything you do, Eugene?"

"You don't pay for my doings, remember! It's your clear duty to consult me about what I've got to pay for!"

"Why should I consult you about a matter that means life or death to me and to my baby, when I know that all you would consider would be, not what is best for me, but what would be cheapest for you! In all the past eight months when have you once shown the slightest interest or concern for my health or comfort? I wouldn't have *dreamed* of consulting you!"

This was a new tone for me to take! He stared at me for an instant as though he did not know me. I rose and began to take down my hair for the night. He sat frowning at the floor, morosely silent, chewing at his lip.

"How long do you propose to stay here?" he presently asked in a sullen tone.

"That depends upon whether I am removed in a coffin or a cab. If a coffin, the time will probably be shorter—but your expenses heavier—quite doubled. A funeral is quite as costly as a birth."

"Don't talk nonsense, my dear!"

"Well, I don't really expect to die!" I said cheerfully. "I don't want to, I'm sure! I've too much to live for."

I've only lately realized how much! Life looked exceedingly drab to me until very, *very* recently. But now I realize that it can be free!—and rich and beautiful! Don't you think it can?"

He regarded me doubtfully, a green jealousy coming into his eyes, jealousy of whatever it was that made my life free and rich and beautiful, for he could not but know that *he* had not contributed to make it so. However little he might value me, he could not bear it that I should not value him above everything else in my life. He could write hopefully to Dorothy Renzheimer of his possible release through my death, and at the same time be jealous of my love for our baby or of my friendship for Edith or for Herrick!

"If you did have to come here, Nancy, why on earth are you here before you are in labor?" he fretted. "Every day adds to the expense. Is your labor overdue?"

"Have you the least idea when it *is* due, Eugene?"

His eyes did not meet mine. I saw that he was not wholly conscience-clear about his part during the past months. "Not exactly," he said, actually embarrassed.

But I did not enlighten him.

"Well?" he inquired. "How soon *do* you expect it?"

"Your tender anxiety, my love, about—your expenses here—touches me deeply!"

"I can't see why your having a baby should justify your running me into debt unnecessarily!" he worried.

"Debt? We don't spend half your salary."

"It is not your fault that we don't! You—"

"Oh, please, please!" I suddenly felt utterly weary and depressed, unable to endure another minute of such talk. "I must go to bed, now, Eugene. You'd better go home, please!"

He suddenly rose and picked up his hat. "I'm awfully busy just now, so I may not be out here again until I am telephoned for. No use my running out until there's something doing."

"No use whatever."

"Good-night, then. Take care of yourself. But," he added grimly, "I don't need to tell *you* to do that, do I?"

He bent to kiss me; then, with one of his sudden impulses, drew me into his arms.

"Don't think I'm indifferent, dear! Of course I'm not! I'll be as glad as you are when it's all over! It's an awful ordeal for a man! And I," he added ruefully, "shan't have your compensation—I don't really want a baby."

When he was gone, and I lay in bed in the serene darkness and isolation of my room, I felt how strange it was that I could be glad of a thing like that—glad that my husband did not want his child!

"But it makes my course so much easier and simpler! I won't have to make him suffer—"

I turned away in shame from a fear I felt stirring in my heart—fear lest Eugene discover himself to be a better man than he thought himself; lest when he actually held his child in his arms, his sense of his fatherhood should beget tenderness, an unselfishness new to him. Then would I not be justified in carrying out the purpose that through these months had been slowly, steadily taking shape in my mind. Then would I be doomed to live on in this wedlock that had become to me shameful; for I knew myself to be one who must have some stronger reason than merely my own selfish desire to justify my breaking away from a relation that had been the deep and vital thing which at first marriage had been to me.

"But it has become unendurable!" my heart rebelled.

"If being a father changes him, his transformation will have come too late! Twice he has killed the love I gave him. Now nothing he might become could revive it!"

But, if he did love the baby, *could* I be ruthless and take it from him? I had never in my life been ruthless to anything. But why be ruthless to myself and submit to the degradation of wedlock without love?

"I cannot believe that parting with his child could ever, ever be to Eugene the cross that living with him has become to me! So if it is a choice between his suffering and mine—"

CHAPTER XIX

I TURNED my eyes away from the gay flowers that filled my room, their brightness seemed so cruelly to mock the black despair in my soul. For now, at the end of all those months of beatific expectation, no baby lay in my arms, my bursting breasts suckled no little mouth, my heart hungered in dull agony for the child of my womb that had been snatched from me at its birth. Oh, I suffered! I wanted my child so passionately! My life was so empty, I *needed* my baby! I could not be reconciled to this cruel thwarting of my love, this cheating me of my motherhood.

I did not want to get well, I did not want to live. It seemed to me I could never again feel interested in anything; never love anything or any one; never again know joy.

What emotion Eugene experienced over the death of the child he had always said he did not want, I could not read in the grim, almost austere silence in which he met it. He appeared to be shocked, rather than wounded. He would not talk about it.

When two days after the birth, the doctor pronounced me safely past all danger, Eugene did not again come to the hospital to see me. The flowers that filled my room were from Edith, Herrick, two of the Academy masters, a few of my acquaintances. Eugene never even telephoned to inquire about me, deeming it, I suppose, unnecessary, since of course if anything went wrong, he would be notified. He overlooked one thing that would have annoyed him if he had been aware of it—the shocked

astonishment of the hospital nurses at this open and flagrant neglect through days and weeks. He did not once think of how his behavior must look to them, or he never would have created such a public impression.

I thought, as I lay, listless and miserable, through long hours in my bed, how bitterly I would once have grieved over his staying away from me like this, day after day, in my sorrow and despair and loneliness.

Was my experience, I wondered, that of many other wives?—discovering that the man you thought you had married had never really existed; to see him fade away like a dissolving screen picture, out of which emerges a deformity of the creature you had loved—a stranger to you. It was almost weird! Sometimes when this stranger, a man I had not known, had taken me into his arms, I had felt like a prostitute.

“Maidens! Why should you worry in choosing whom you should marry?

Choose whom you may, you will find you have got somebody else.”

Did Eugene perhaps feel equally disillusioned about me? For he had certainly once been very much in love with me! Even yet he ardently desired me—

A shuddering chill shook me, and my watchful nurse came to me. While she intrenched me in hot water bottles, my reflections went on—

It was something more, too, than mere desire that he felt for me even yet. I was conscious of the fact that, however little attention he might pay to me, he liked having me about; hated to come into the house and not find me there; even when he was for hours shut up in his study (writing love letters to Dorothy Renzheimer) my pres-

ence in the house gave him, in some subtle way, satisfaction and comfort.

And yet, in spite of this—he loved money so much—hadn't he perhaps cherished a hope that I would not pull through? And wasn't he just now suffering a keen disappointment?

His remaining away from me like this might be an expression of his displeasure at some discoveries he must be making at home during my long absence; discoveries I intended he should make; the fact, for instance, that Addie was a woman and not a half grown girl; that her wages were not two dollars a week; that she did not do the family washing and that a laundress had to be paid for. I should have to reckon with him for these things when I went home.

But that did not trouble me.

When after the fifth day I was allowed to receive visitors and Herrick began to call every day, while my husband continued to remain away, I saw that the nurse was beginning to view the situation askance. I actually became rather embarrassed under her suspicious eyes.

I asked her one day, when I began to feel that I should go mad if I did not stop brooding, to telephone to my husband to bring me certain books from the shelves in my room at home.

She reported Eugene's reply; he was too busy to bring the books himself, but would send his sister with them.

The nurse, in delivering this reply, regarded me curiously.

I instructed her that on no account was she to allow Mrs. Klam to come into my room. I knew that in my present state I could not endure a visit from Lottie.

It was not until three days later that some books arrived and they were not the ones I had asked for, but

three of Lottie's selection, the nurse reporting that Mrs. Klam thought these would be better for me than any she could find in my room. They were *The Harvester* by Gene Stratton-Porter, something by Fanny Hurst, and *Just David* by the author of *Pollyanna*.

However, Herrick and Edith, both rejoicing that I was feeling even a desire to rouse myself to read, had, by this time, abundantly supplied me with books and periodicals.

I noticed that Herrick, obviously to avoid encroaching upon Eugene's visits to me, always came to see me during school hours. But one evening, his Chinaman having concocted a marvelous ice for his dessert, he, thinking that it might tempt my dead appetite, jumped into his car and ran out to the hospital with a bowl of it. Coming into my room with apologies on his tongue for intruding when Eugene and I must wish to have each other to ourselves, he found me alone.

I really did enjoy the ice—the first thing I had relished since my illness; and Herrick sat by, much pleased to see me eat it.

"I'll fade away as soon as Eugene appears," he assured me. "I thought he would be here by this time. When does he usually get here?"

"He doesn't get here."

"To-day, you mean?"

"He never comes."

He looked at me without speaking for an instant, astonishment and questioning in his eyes.

"Doesn't come to see you?" he at last repeated. "But why not?"

"I don't know."

"Not a quarrel? No, impossible—at this time, with you ill and in grief—"

"We never seriously quarrel. It bores him to come and as he is not needed, he sees no use in coming."

"But to comfort and help you—to see that you have what you want and need—"

It was amazement, rather than indignation, that moved him.

"He knows I am well taken care of here; that if I need him I can send for him. As for comfort and help, I fancy he thinks he is the one that needs that!"

"Why more than you, in God's name?"

"Herrick, it is not Eugene's fault, you know, that he is a frugal Pennsylvania German. To have all this expense for no return, nothing gained—you see?"

"My God, Nancy, you don't mean to say he is taking it out of you?"

"It does not endear me to him—in spite of the fact that he didn't want a child. He probably thinks I've proved myself a dreary failure in woman's natural function!"

"And so he leaves you here alone day after day!—doesn't even know, probably, how you suffer—"

"You see, Herrick, Eugene's rearing did not give him ideals of thoughtful consideration for others, of chivalry, and he is only acting up to his rearing."

"And you are tied to that!" Herrick burst forth—but quickly checked himself, alarmed lest, in my weakened state, he should excite me. He set his jaws grimly as he rose to relieve me of the bowl.

"Now, Herrick, I see that you are firmly resolving to go to Eugene and give him a piece of your mind! Please don't!"

"I should think you'd want some one to!"

"No! Give him rope—all the rope he'll take—"

"To hang himself with?"

I turned away my head without answering.

"I think I get you," said Herrick. "I hope I do. Very well. I shan't interfere. Anything I can do for you, my dear?"

"I had a letter to-day from Weesy that worries me; about Eugene's mother. She's ill, Weesy says—"

"You want me to take it to Eugene?"

"He wouldn't do anything. He and Lottie are claiming, now, that since Weesy got the Curry farm, she owes it to their mother to support her. They have stopped sending the monthly payments they had agreed upon. Oh, Herrick! I don't know anything in life more pathetic than helpless old people dependent upon children that are reluctant to take care of them!"

"Eugene ought to be shown up!"

"I've been sending the monthly payments and letting Weesy think they came from Eugene. But you see the amount they agreed to pay was quite too small. And now to-day this letter from Weesy—"

I took it from the table by my bed and read:—

"Here is sad news for your home folks. Sabbath your Mom turned yellow and the whites of her eyes got yellow and her back pains her and she won't eat her wittles. Mondays we had Doctor and he said yeller janders, Old Age and Worry. If get better will get worse again after whiles. And a question of six months or most eight unless not worry about money. He said should he tell her and we said not to. So he said try and jolly her up. He ordered calomel followed with castor oil and a prescription. So you see what it's costing. And me I have still to go for my teeth and I'm miserable."

"Now, Herrick, *could* you spare the time to go out there," I asked as I laid the letter aside, "and do for Mrs. Curry whatever ought to be done?—what you would

do if you were Eugene!—and I'll pay whatever is necessary. And whatever you do for her, let her think it comes from Eugene."

"If Weesy writes to him and gives it away?"

"By that time I shall be ready to speak."

"Of what? Your money?"

"Of that and everything."

"You're going to tell Eugene who you are?"

"Everything."

"It's amazing he doesn't suspect anything! Why, ever since your dinner and your intimacy with Edith Leiter, every one's been feeling you couldn't always have been a village teacher!—that you must have 'seen better days'!"

"Eugene's too self-absorbed to see some things that are right under his nose."

"I'd like to be by, Nancy, when you break it to him!"

"I wish I didn't have to be by!" I sighed.

CHAPTER XX

IT began now, apparently, to penetrate Eugene's consciousness that the silence between him and the hospital (which was probably not from deliberate, intentional neglect on his part, so much as just careless indifference) was becoming rather deep and prolonged, for one morning, nearly three weeks after the birth, he telephoned to me. I was able to go the telephone myself by now, as it was in the hall just outside my room.

"Well, how are you getting on?" he asked in a flat, uninterested tone.

"Oh, don't let your anxiety run away with you, my dear!"

"But why haven't you called me up Nancy? Or told the nurse to?"

"Why haven't you called *us* up?"

"Intended to run out to see you—but have been very much tied up. Well, when are you coming home?"

"As soon as I'm able."

"When is that likely to be?"

"Oh, in about a week, I suppose. Isn't Addie taking good care of you?"

"She is not here. I've discharged her. Taking my meals at Lottie's."

"You will have to get her back before I come home."

"Lottie says *she'll* help you out for a while."

"Lottie is very kind, but if Addie is not there, I shall have to stay here much longer—until I am strong enough to help myself."

"*Lottie* will help you out until you are able to help your-

self!" he retorted irritably. "Surely you can come home soon now?"

"Not very soon if Addie is not there."

"I'm afraid you'll have to do without Addie—at least until I have paid off the hospital and doctor— Well, I'll be up to see you soon—to-day or to-morrow perhaps."

I hung up the receiver.

He neither came nor telephoned again during the next three days. So I decided that, without notifying him, I would accept Edith's urgent invitation to visit her for a week before going home. The awkwardness of Eugene's situation when he would at length present himself at the hospital and betray to the officials his ignorance of the fact that he did not know his wife had left nor where she was, did not trouble me. It would give him a much needed jolt as to his outrageous disregard of me. Not that I cared any longer how he disregarded me. But I did not object to his having a little salutary discipline.

Although Edith asked no questions and I volunteered no information, she was of course aware of an unnatural relation between my husband and me. She herself had visited me at the hospital so constantly that she could not help realizing how seldom, if ever, Eugene was there.

However, from the moment he learned that I was at Leiter's Hill, he was not lacking in attentions to me. But the first time he came, a servant told him I was sleeping and could not be wakened; and Mrs. Leiter asked to be excused. The second time, we were out motoring. The third, a masseuse was treating me—and again Edith begged to be excused. The fourth, my hair was being washed and the fifth, I was again asleep.

"I'm beginning to get myself in hand a bit—to come up out of that awful blackness," I explained to Edith, "and it won't help me at all to see Eugene just yet."

She offered me no reason for her own refusal to see him.

At last he prudently telephoned to ask *when* I could see him. He was, I heard in his voice, becoming appalled. It was five weeks since he had laid eyes on me, though he was but a mile away from me.

I answered that it was unnecessary for him to come again, as Mrs. Leiter was about to take me home.

The night before I left Edith, I told her everything—even to the plans I had formed for the immediate future.

CHAPTER XXI

NEVER, I am sure was there a more dreary home-coming; my arms empty of the precious burden I had expected to carry back with me; my heart heavy and sad; my immediate future a bitter struggle.

No preparations had been made for my home-coming; the house was dusty and dirty; the kitchen fire was out, so there was no hot water; the rooms were chill.

When Eugene came home that day at four o'clock he found me in the sitting-room (which I had dusted and put in order) lying on the couch before a crackling fire which I had built, for the day was raw; the tea-table was laid beside the couch and as soon as he appeared I sat up to brew some tea and make a bit of toast with an electric toaster.

His face lit up at sight of this cozy picture after the repellant unhomelikeness of our house during the weeks of my absence. He kissed me and sat down beside me on the couch.

There was no doubt about it that the resentment which, on many counts, he was cherishing against me, was greatly tempered by his approval of my intimacy with Edith, and that this intimacy gave him a respect for me that nothing in me had ever inspired.

"Ah, this is living again!" he exclaimed involuntarily. "I didn't realize what a comfortable housekeeper you were until you went away! You've got a knack somehow—Lottie's ménage seems a bit common to me after getting used to your way of doing things. But, Nancy," he asked, his face darkening, a really hurt look in his eyes,

"why would Mrs. Leiter not see me when I went up there every day? I think she treated me strangely! Not very politely, I must say!"

He did not inquire why *I* had not seen him. That was decidedly a minor matter.

"She noticed that you never came to see me at the hospital," I answered impersonally and quite pleasantly, "as she was there every day herself. She resented it—for me."

"Did she tell you that?" he curtly inquired.

"People don't always have to dot i's and cross t's!"

"But didn't you explain to her," he anxiously asked, "that I was very busy?—and quite ready to come any moment I was needed. You should not have left her under the impression that I was lacking in my duty to you!"

"But you were."

"If you felt that I was, why didn't you 'phone for me?"

"The one time that I did have the nurse 'phone and ask you for some books I wanted, it was three days before they came and then they were not what I had asked for, but what Lottie thought I'd like!" I spoke quietly and without resentment.

"Now, Nancy, you could not expect me to neglect my school work to play errand boy—or to be uselessly paying formal calls on you at that hospital!"

"You found time to go to Leiter's Hill every day," I suggested placidly.

"You were well then and able to talk with me—and anyway that was quite different from going to that public hospital."

"Was it? I don't see why. I was in both places. And quite able to talk with any one after the fifth day."

"If you had let me know you wanted me to come to see you at the hospital—"

"I didn't want you. I didn't care whether you came or not," I said cheerfully, as I handed him a cup of tea and a plate of buttered toast.

"Indeed! Then how do you make out that I was lacking in my duty," he coldly inquired, "since you didn't care to see me?"

"But you didn't even know whether I cared to see you; whether I was lonely; whether there was anything I might want; whether I was well taken care of—"

"At fifty-five dollars a week! I had a right to assume, surely, that they'd at least not neglect you!"

"Herrick did not assume it. He came every day with flowers and books and dainties—"

"'Herrick'? You mean Appleton? You call him 'Herrick'?"

"As you call Miss Renzheimer 'Dorothy.'"

He flushed and averted his eyes as he retorted, "Well, naturally, since if I had not married you, I would have married her."

"Lucky girl!"

"*You're* the lucky girl! But you don't at all appreciate your luck!"

"She certainly doesn't appreciate hers!"

"Oh come, now! If you think I neglected you, I think we're quits, for I certainly have a few counts against *you*! Why, for instance, did you put me in a most embarrassing position by not notifying me when you left the hospital?"

"You deserved to be embarrassed, Eugene! To be shown up!"

"Shown up?"

"Your utter unconcern for your wife in confinement—in bitter grief!"

"If you want to call it unconcern when a man is paying fifty-five dollars a week for the care of his wife in a private room of a first class private hospital—"

"But it was not by your wish or your arrangement that I was in that room in that hospital!"

"Any one would think," he said petulantly, "that you had been a millionaire's pampered daughter! That you had been used to what Mrs. Leiter has always had! Will you tell me," he demanded, fixing me with a stern, accusing eye, "why you deceived me so long about Addie?—where you got the money to pay her *sixty dollars a month*? Besides hiring the laundry work! And how on earth were you spending all your time while I was slaving all day at school-teaching?—under the impression, of course, that you were at home doing the housework with Addie. Much housework there was left for *you* to do, with a retinue of servants here for just two people!—Well?" he insisted as I said nothing. "Explain it! Where did you get the money? Look here, Nancy! Have you all along been concealing something from me? Did your parents leave you a little inheritance?"

"No."

"Well, I know *I* didn't give you any sixty dollars a month for Addie! And Lottie says she's beginning to realize that the clothes you wear are quite expensive; some of them from very exclusive New York shops!"

"So are yours."

"But I know where the money came from that paid for mine! It's absurd to pretend that the savings from your teaching is paying for all this!"

"Yes, that would be very absurd!"

"But that's what you did pretend, as to your clothes anyway."

"No, you assumed it; I didn't 'pretend.' You knew that I had to have clothes, yet you never offered me any money. Only once, during the whole year that we have been married did I ever ask you for any money for myself—and then, you remember, you gave me two dollars!—and asked me what I wanted it for! How you could be so blind and dull as to suppose a woman could get along a whole year without money—"

"I didn't suppose that. I thought you must still have a bit of your own. You talk as though I had not supported you! You've had your home here. I've paid the bills, haven't I?"

"You've not supported me. I have paid for all the housework, clothed myself and sent money to your mother."

"Sent money to Mother! What did you do that for?" he snapped. "My mother is my affair, not yours!"

"You don't make her your affair."

"And will you kindly tell me where all this money comes from?—since you say your parents left you nothing!"

"I didn't say that."

"But you certainly did—just a minute ago."

"You asked me whether they left me 'a little inheritance' and I said no. It is not what *you* would call a little inheritance."

He misunderstood me. "It can't have been so very insignificant the way you have been spending! Have you spent all of it?"

"No."

"How much have you?"

"How much have *you*?" I parried. "I mean how much of your salary have you saved this year?"

"That's my business!"

I smiled as I poured myself a cup of tea.

"I hope you have enough of yours left to pay that fancy hospital bill!" he suggested.

He had known me for two years as an orphan and a teacher on a salary of forty dollars a month. Therefore, my inheritance, he knew, must have been very small.

"I will pay the hospital bill," I said.

He looked highly pleased at that. "Of course, my dear, when you no longer have any money of your own, you must ask me for what you need."

"Must I?"

"Well, naturally."

"Come and *ask* you for what I need? Has a wife no rights that she must beg for her necessities? Eugene, no modern woman that isn't a worm, will accept matrimony on such terms!"

"When a modern woman is dependent on her husband, it seems to me she's got to 'accept matrimony' on his conditions. Of course if he's a gentleman, he'll be decent about it."

I stared at him incredulously—"a gentleman"—"decent"—could people's standards really be so different as Eugene's and mine?

"If you don't like dependence," he added, "why did you so recklessly squander your own money? You must be nearly at the end of it by now. Paying Addie more than your salary as a teacher! It was reckless! I suppose that's why you didn't tell me you had this money—you were afraid I would object to your wasting it like that! Was that your idea?"

"No."

"Well, then, what was it?"

"My idea was to make an experiment. To prove something."

"Prove something? Prove what?"

"Whether you cared more for me than for Dorothy Renzheimer's money."

He considered this with a thoughtful frown as he sipped his tea, looking at me over the edge of his cup, a slow color rising in his face. "I don't get that," he said, shaking his head.

"You see, you have always hinted to me (and your family have openly said it) that you sacrificed yourself in marrying me when you could have tied up with Miss Renzheimer's fortune. So, because I did not want you to care more for my money than for me (because, Eugene, I feel that I have something better to give my husband than my money)—*that* was why I didn't tell you I had any money."

He laughed. "That's rating yourself rather cheap, isn't it? Care more for your little bit of money than for you? Now, Dorothy's fortune, that's a different figure!"

"I might well hesitate, you mean, to rate myself worth more than *that*?"

"Well, if you're modest, yes," he replied, pinching my cheek.

"You see, Eugene, it was because I did rate myself as of more value than any amount of money that I came to you as a penniless girl."

"Well, I assure you, my dear, that a few thousand dollars would not have greatly changed your value to me," he said, looking amused, "though I do think," he added with a frown, "that you had no right to conceal from me what you had, nor to squander so much of it as you have done."

"I had another reason for keeping it from you. I didn't want you to know who I really was. I *have* deceived you, Eugene. You think you married a village school teacher. Well, you didn't. You married the daughter of a famous criminal."

He put his cup down with a clatter. "What do you mean? Good God!"

"I am Sherwin Claxton's daughter, Eugene."

He stared at me wildly. "Sherwin Claxton! You *his daughter!* Oh, you're not! Come, you're crazy, saying a thing like that! You can't mean the famous architect that was murdered in a brothel?"

I nodded. "Perhaps," I said sadly, "you will thank God our child didn't live, with that blood and that disgrace!"

"But—but Sherwin Claxton! You *his daughter!* You!" He gulped and stammered. "That notorious—" He gazed at me as though he had never seen me before. But I did not see in his bewildered, startled eyes the shock of horror I had expected to see when I should break it to him who I was. "I can't take it in!" he said hoarsely, "though I do now see through a lot of things—Why, your father was an aristocrat!—of old famous lineage! It all came out at the trial of the murderer—Why, Nancy, you're a blue blood! But why didn't you tell me? Now I *am* beginning to understand some puzzling things about you! By God! You the daughter of Sherwin Claxton! Yes, I remember the newspapers spoke of a seventeen-year old daughter! And you are she! My wife the daughter of Sherwin Claxton!"

How I had once dreaded the hour when that fact would possibly have to be told to my husband! But now, a dawning delight in his excited eyes held my own in a wondering speculation. I remembered Herrick's having

insisted months ago that Eugene would feel the disgrace of the connection far less than the honor—

"Yes, I realize now," he continued breathlessly, "that you've always *shown* yourself to be true blue! I suppose of course," he suddenly surmised, "Mrs. Leiter knew you before you met her here?"

"Never. I only told her last night who I am."

"And she was keen enough to recognize, from the moment she met you, that you were of her class all right, wasn't she?" he said exultantly. "You look it and act it and always have! You—"

"You didn't always think so."

"Oh, yes, I did! I can see now that in my heart I always did. No wonder your dinner party had such distinction and was so impressive! You knew from experience how— Why, Nancy!" he exclaimed, starting to take me into his arms—but I drew away to the farthest corner of the couch. "You know," he went on almost hysterically, "I can't get over it that I have married the daughter of the great Sherwin Claxton!"

"You don't mind my father's shame?"

"Is it that fear, my poor child, that is making you draw away from me? Well, of course I do mind, Nancy, naturally. But," he added magnanimously, "I fully appreciate his ability and standing. Your father was a great man, a genius! *Why* have you kept all this a secret from me? It would have made such a dif—"

He stopped short, a shade of confusion in his eyes.

"That's what I feared," I said, "that it would make such a difference to you. I wanted to be—loved or despised—for myself alone and not for any—fortune or disgrace—attached to me."

"'Fortune'!" He seized upon the word with a startled exclamation. "But—but your father was enormously

rich! Good heavens! How much *do* you have, in God's name?"

"A larger income than any one has a right to, that doesn't work for it. So I am going to begin at once to earn the right to it. That's not very ethical economics, I suppose. But at least I'm not going to be a parasite."

"We'll have plenty of use for all we've got, never fear! To think that you have kept all this from me! What *is* your income, my dear?"

"Quite disgracefully large."

I suddenly rose and picked up the tea-tray to carry it down to the kitchen. But to my mingled amusement and disgust, Eugene, with all the gallantry of his choicest society manner, jumped up to take it from me. Evidently I had suddenly become, in his eyes, quite another woman; one to be treated no longer as a chattel, but with homage. How could he be so lacking in subtlety as not to shade off this change in his manner to less abrupt transformation?—to break to me more gradually the fact that my family's position and my fortune were in his eyes worthy of a respect and a consideration which I, as an individual, had never elicited from him.

"If I had brought him that other rich gift—a baby—he would never have repaid me with such reverence and gratitude as he will give to my money and position!"

When he returned from the kitchen, I had locked myself into the guest room.

CHAPTER XXII

THE hardest things I had to endure during the next few days were Eugene's respect and consideration and the sycophantish behavior of the Klams, especially Lottie; for though I steadily eluded stating the extent of my means, Elmer, not to be balked of such a succulent morsel of knowledge, searched through some New York papers three years old and found a copy of my father's will. The excitement of all of them over this was almost more pitiable than it was sickening.

Lottie's new solicitude for me lest I overtax myself; her constant offers of all kinds of favors and assistance—propitiatory, not aggressive; her manner of mingled awe and tender affection; her sympathy for the loss of my baby in contrast with the critical remarks she had made to Edith about my having added to my other failures in the capacity of wife to "Brother," the failure to achieve motherhood; her frequently sending Florence over to see me with tributes of early spring flowers from their back yard (I was no longer dangerous to Florence) her seeking and deferring to my opinion on questions of "what's the proper thing" to do or say or wear, instead of trying, as before, to force her opinions upon me—all this was wearisome almost beyond endurance.

"If you can't get Addie back," I had told Eugene the morning after my return home, "you will have to keep on taking your meals at Lottie's, for I am not strong enough to cook three meals a day—and wouldn't if I were—not while you have a salary of eight thousand dollars a year!"

"And you nearly that much a month! Of course we shall have Addie back!"

"If we can get her. Mrs. Charles Leiter has taken her over."

Edith was more willing to give Addie up temporarily than the girl was to come back to us.

"But it will be for only a few days, Addie, to help me out," I pleaded over the telephone. "I'll give you a present—"

So the old routine was, for the time being, restored—with one difference; Eugene no longer spent his evenings away from home. I frequently found it necessary, in order to escape his trying to make love to me, and his endless talk, *ad nauseam*, about "our" wealth, to get Herrick or Edith to join us, or to run away for an evening to Leiter's Hill.

He was very restive at my keeping to the guest room. "Surely you are strong enough now, dear, to come back—"

My locked door was my answer.

On the third day after my return, he alarmed me by saying, "Of course I shall resign from the Academy at the end of the term. With all *we* have, I need never toil again, thanks be! I shall return to lecturing."

"Don't be in a hurry to resign," I said hastily.

"But why? I shan't continue to be a school-master with such an income as ours! Why should I?"

"Ours'? I never heard you call your salary 'our income'!"

"Oh, please, dear, don't keep throwing things like that at me all the time! It's largely your fault if I didn't measure up to your expectations. If you hadn't kept me in the dark as to who you *were*—"

"Don't resign your position," I advised him. "I'm

not going to live as a social parasite myself, you know, and certainly shall not be responsible for making you one."

"You don't expect me to drudge at school-teaching when we've got an income—"

"You expected me to drudge at housework and farm work when we had an income of—oh, well!" I broke off, "I won't remind you of those embarrassing things. Only—hold on to your job a bit longer!"

With which advice I escaped, as I was constantly doing these days, behind the locked door of the guest room.

When Weesy wrote to thank Eugene with abjectly grateful effusion for the money his mother has received from him through Dr. Appleton, he was greatly upset.

"Don't fling money around like that, my dear! You should consult me before you spend such sums as that! Why, Mother has no need for so much as that—she could not use that much in years! What did you do it for?"

"To give your mother some sense of security in these last years of her life, a few comforts for her old age, and to pay a doctor when she's ill. Don't you think she ought to have all this after such a life of hard work as she has had and all she did for you?"

"But two thousand dollars! Why, twenty-five dollars would have been a handsome sum to send and would have put them into the seventh heaven of gratitude! Do consult me before you do anything like that again! You will have to give me power of attorney, or with such reckless spending and giving, you will run through with all we have!"

"I've taken care of all I have for three years—with the advice of my lawyer, who is my cousin."

"And I suppose he gets a big rake-off? Well, we can

save *that* expense when you turn over the management to me."

"My cousin has always refused to charge me for his services."

"You may be sure he makes something out of it, or why would he bother with it? Might as well keep it all in the family."

By the sixth day after my return home I had completed the preparations at which I had been working for a week. So that when Eugene came in from the Academy at five o'clock that day and, instead of shutting himself up in his study until dinner time, as had been his wont before my confinement, he came immediately upstairs to me in the sitting-room, I was ready for him.

"Don't you ever go to see Miss Dorothy Renzheimer any more?" I asked him as I handed him a cup of tea.

"My dear," he smiled on me kindly, "you have no need to be jealous of her! Put that out of your little heart!"

"I can't—because it isn't there to be put out. I never was jealous of her—not even before I had seen her."

"Right you were. She's your inferior in every way."

"I shan't remind you (since you don't like reminders) how hopelessly inferior I was to her and how positively amusing, if not presumptuous, it was for me to think her vulgar—up to a week ago!"

"Naturally I didn't like to hear my friends who had been kind and hospitable to me called vulgar!—and sneered at!"

"Miss Renzheimer sneered at me—to you!" I added on a guess.

"Who told you anything like that?" he demanded, though his face flushed and his eyes fell.

"What explanation are you giving her for not spending your evenings with her any more?"

"Nancy, she simply would not let me alone! She was a perfect nuisance! I *had* behaved like a cad to her and I had to try to mollify her. But I tell you, my dear little puss, you need not be jealous of her any more! I've settled that matter—"

"Don't let her down too abruptly—you might want to take her on again; you can't always be sure about those things—"

"Don't let us talk about her, my dear. I would rather talk about you. What a pretty new spring suit! Where did you get it?—and what did you pay for it?"

"It's a traveling suit. I'm going to New York this evening."

He started in surprise. "But I can't very well go with you on such short notice. What do you want to do in New York?"

"My answer is what yours always is—or used to be," I smiled, "whenever I asked you that question on your announcing a trip to New York. Do you remember?"

"Really, Nancy, it's getting on my nerves, the way you answer everything I say with nasty remarks like that!"

"Your answers used to get on my nerves too. I know just how you feel!" I said sympathetically.

"Oh, come, come, dear! Look here," he abruptly suggested, "wait until to-morrow, and I can go with you."

"I am going to-night—alone."

"Oh, indeed! Getting awfully independent, aren't we! How long are you leaving me here alone?"

"When I used to ask you that, you know, you'd tell me it was none of my business."

"Oh, Nancy, for God's sake, cut that out!"

"Well, I will. I won't tease you any more!"

"When are you coming home, dear?"

"I am never coming back."

He turned as white as death. I think he had not been wholly unprepared for this. In the light of his new knowledge of my past, he was not so entirely unconscious as he pretended to be of how our married life must have outraged and deeply disgusted me. Once during the past week, when, among the many harrowing reminders I offered him, was that of my summer on the farm, he looked almost ill, and for once had no excuse to make for himself.

"What do you mean, Nancy?" he asked huskily.

"You've been tried in the balance and found wanting, Eugene. I would have left you months ago but for the baby."

"I admit I have not been what I should have been. But you complained so little—you could have done anything with me, Nancy—anything you wanted to do!"

"I never wanted to do anything 'with' you. I wanted to stand aside and watch you—to see what manner of man this was that I had married—who talked in public like a god and behaved in private like a cad! Was it the god or the cad that was the real man? Well, I found out!"

To my horror he fell on his knees before me, seized my hands and buried his head in my lap, pleading with me not to "desert" him; not to "humiliate and disgrace" him.

"Suppose, Eugene, I should tell you I've lost all but a little of my fortune—would you still beg me so hard to stay with you? Have you, since you believed me rich, spoiled your chances with Dorothy Renzheimer? Can you still take her up if I relieve you of the incumbrance of myself? You did think me an incumbrance, you know, a few months ago, even a few weeks ago!"

"I know you've not lost your money—and I never really thought you an incumbrance!" he passionately protested. "Oh, Nancy, you *have* been the only woman—"

I freed myself from his clasp and stood up. I thought I might shorten this painful scene by another "reminder."

"Eugene," I said as he, too, stood up and, white and disheveled, his eyes bloodshot, faced me, "I read a letter you wrote to Miss Renzheimer."

"Ah, I thought as much! You took advantage of my having a headache one afternoon! Do you think that was a nice thing to do?"

"No. But was it 'nice' for you to *write* that letter? I found it scattered about the hall and in gathering it up I saw what it was, so of course I read it all—how you had been 'trapped' into your marriage; your hope of 'future happiness' with Dorothy Renzheimer; your hope that your release from the 'trap' into which you had been 'tricked' might now be imminent (were you awfully disappointed, Eugene, that I didn't die in child-bed?); your utter devotion to her, the only woman you had ever thought of marrying; of my failure to meet you on your own plane; of your longing and impatience for the 'completer union' you might have with her who so perfectly understood you— Well, you don't have to wait any longer. You are free now to go to her."

"I don't want her! I never wanted her! Her money, yes, that I did want. But *you* are the woman I love and want!"

"You're not worthy of her either!" I said, turning away.

He took a quick step to my side and again seized my hands, beseeching, protesting, promising to treat me "as a lady should be treated."

"Don't you see that your failure to recognize that I

was what you call 'a lady,' proves you incapable of treating me or any woman 'as a lady should be treated'?"

"Give me a chance to prove to you that that is not true; that I *can* treat you as you deserve!"

"It isn't any longer a question of how you treat me, it's what you are. I not only don't love you any more—I despise you, Eugene!"

He winced and his lips became ashy. "But I tell you, Nancy, Dorothy Renzheimer—"

"She has nothing really to do with my leaving you. It was not your infidelity that killed my love, but living with you day after day—and night after night! Physical infidelity is nothing to such a spiritual gulf as there is between you and me, Eugene!"

So soft and yielding I had always seemed to him, it was hard for him to realize, now, as he continued to plead with me, the power of resistance that for many months had been growing in my soul.

But when he did at last see that I was impregnable to anything he could say, his countenance seemed suddenly to go black and he turned to threats.

"You shall not disgrace me like this! And ruin me! And make me lose my school! After trapping me into marrying you under false pretenses! There are insane asylums for women like you! And your father's record won't help you to prove your sanity! I can shut you up in an asylum and I will do it, too, if you don't give up this mad idea of leaving me!"

"My lawyer has a sealed copy of that letter of yours to Miss Renzheimer," I quietly told him, "to be used in case of necessity."

His anger collapsed at that and he began again to importune me.

"Won't you give me some hope, Nancy, that some time

you'll forgive me all you think you have against me—and come back to me?" he begged.

"It isn't a question of forgiveness. Time couldn't change that inner quality that is *you*—and that I—loathe!"

He humbled himself until it was I who winced.

"At least don't divorce me! Give me a *chance* to prove myself! Just let me see you now and then and—"

I decided it would be kinder to leave him no shred of hope.

"I am going to marry Herrick as soon as I can get a divorce."

He stared dumbly at me for an instant. Suddenly he sank upon the couch, looking ill.

"Then," I said, "you can marry Miss Renzheimer."

"You believe in promiscuous mating like that, do you?" he sneered.

"Promiscuous mating? No, indeed, I don't. You and I were never mated, only yoked. Herrick *is* my mate!"

"Good God! You and he are not proposing to set up housekeeping here in Leitersville, I hope—where I've got to live!"

"Of course not. He is leaving here very soon."

"Dropping his great work for the masses to marry another man's wife!" Eugene bitterly scoffed.

"No, he is donating his house here to the labor organization to carry on the educational work he has started."

"How do you know," he fiercely demanded, "that he can satisfy you any better than I have?"

"I've known him all my life. Our homes were two adjoining places on the Hudson. It was a dreadful shock to me when he turned up on the farm last summer. And when he found me trying to work as I never had; saw me

neglected, treated contemptuously by you, and offensively by Lottie—I had a hard time to hold him down!—he wanted to tell you who I was—”

“If *you* had only told me who you were, Nancy! Look what unhappiness it would have saved—”

“I am very glad and thankful that I kept my secret—until I had proved you!”

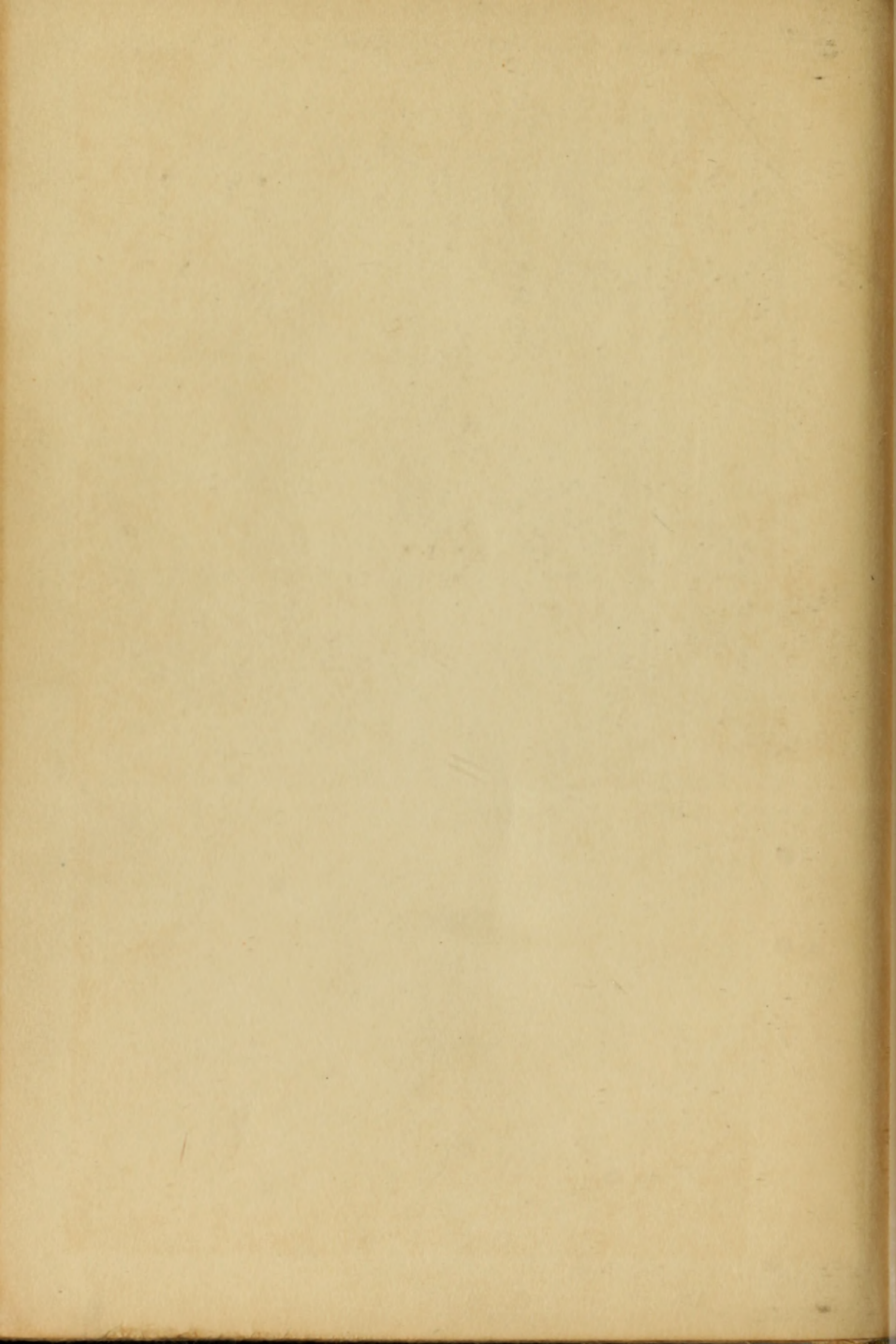
“But have you no belief in the sacredness of marriage?” he exclaimed. “Whom God hath joined—”

“Your letter to Dorothy Renzheimer?”

“If you could only know how little I meant what I was such a fool as to write to her! To me marriage *is* sacred! If it isn’t so to you, how can you hope for anything better or more enduring in marrying Appleton?”

“It’s because I do believe in its sacredness that I can’t endure a desecration of it,” I said as I turned and left the room.

THE END



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